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THE MINISTRY OF HOME.

THE

MINISTRY OF HOME;

OR,

BRIEF EXPOSITORY LECTURES ON DIVINE TRUTH.

DESIGNED ESPECIALLY FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE READING.

BY

OCTAVIUS WINSLOW, D.D.

"I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord."—*Genesis* xviii. 19.

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PREFACE.

THE present volume is intended to be, with the Divine permission, the first of a series of similar works by the same author, designed especially, as the general title indicates, for family and private reading. The object is to supply simple and brief Expositions of Divine Truth, suitable for domestic instruction and closet meditation; thus aiding the "priest over his own house" in conducting family worship, and in other ways training his children and his household for God and for eternity. To this end care has been taken, both in the selection and discussion of the subjects, to meet the diversified shades of individual

character, religious experience, and domestic trial, generally found to exist in the family circle.

It has been the earnest aim of the author to make CHRIST the substance of each reading and the centre of the entire work; that, viewing the subject from any stand-point, HE may be seen as the one Object around whom all Divine honour clusters, from whom all saving truth emanates, and towards whom all Christian experience and practical godliness should converge.

The author would fain hope that the influence and usefulness of these volumes may extend to regions beyond the ministry of home, and be found to aid the humble service of the cottage lecture, the earnest labours of the lay-preacher, and even find its way into the rural Sanctuary of the outlying hamlet, dependent for its Sabbath services upon the zealous but uncertain ministrations of the itinerating evangelist. The second volume in the series will embrace more frequent re-

ference to eminent and instructive characters drawn from inspired history, illustrative of doctrinal teaching, exemplifying and enforcing experimental and practical religion.

With this brief explanation of his design, the author, though deeply sensible of its many shortcomings, ventures to lay his work at the feet of the Christian Church; trusting that, at least, the unsectarian spirit which it breathes will secure for it among the one Body of Christ a kind and indulgent acceptance; and praying that the vital and precious truths which it has endeavoured to unfold, may win for it the blessing, and promote far-reaching the glory, of the TRIUNE GOD.

Bath, May, 1867.

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THE MINISTRY OF HOME.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

"As for ME *and* MY HOUSE, *we will serve the Lord."*

THE *image* of this impressive passage is taken from the highest form of human society—the *family* constitution. There exists not, among earthly institutions, a diviner, holier, or more beauteous one than the *domestic.* It was among the earliest, as among the wisest and most beneficent, creations of God; and, when it has been preserved in its integrity—pure, honoured, and sanctified—it has proved a well-spring of individual happiness, social progress, and national prosperity, of the loftiest character. The human race—sinful and divided as it is—has never entirely lost its family instincts and domestic yearnings. Separated from its Divine Creator, and, consequently, separated from itself, mankind still crave and strive after unity. To meet this want and to satisfy this desire, men have devised and employed

various expedients. The sword has been drunk with blood; Commerce has spread its canvas upon every sea; Ecclesiasticism has employed its engine of power; but all attempts to accomplish a unity of the race into one great family, under one supreme human will and head, have proved signal and complete failures. Thus the experiment has been tried without effect upon a grand and costly scale. But what was impossible for man has proved possible with God. The Lord Jesus has done what no chivalry, or commerce, or ecclesiasticism could do. By His *incarnation* He taught the doctrine of a common humanity; a humanity shared alike by the subject as by the Sovereign, by the unlearned as by the philosopher, by the slave as by the master—the human race "made of *one blood* to dwell on all the face of the earth:" and by His *death* upon the cross, He moulds all who believe in Him into one holy brotherhood, constituting the ONE FAMILY of God. Now, of this essentially one family of God, the domestic institution is a beautiful and perfect type. It is from this institution the passage which I have selected, as suggesting the thoughts of the present introduction, derives its expressive image.

Joshua was the head of a household. He was an eminent servant of God. As such, he was one of the most distinguished personal types of the Lord Jesus Christ found in the Old Testament. On the death of Moses he was appointed to lead the sacred tribes into the pro-

mised land. Although the great legislator of Israel had brought them up out of Egypt, and had led them through the wilderness to the borders of Canaan, he was not permitted to complete the work he had undertaken, but was compelled to relinquish into the hands of Joshua the honour of settling the tribes of Israel in the promised land. It is, perhaps, in this part of his remarkable history that his typical relation to the Lord Jesus Christ first appears. Moses could only lead the children of Israel *to* the border of Canaan; but Joshua led them *into* Canaan, and settled them in the good land. Thus did the Lord Jesus Christ accomplish for us what the *law*, of which Moses was the type, could not do. The law convinces of sin, but is totally inadequate to justify or save; and, therefore, could never effect our entrance into heaven, and make us possessors of the inheritance which we lost in the first Adam, but which we regain in Christ the Second Adam. Thus, "*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*" Thus, too, we are taught that, "*by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified:*" that, as the sacred tribes looked to Joshua to conduct them into Canaan, and not to Moses, so we as sinners are to look in faith to *Jesus*, and not to the *law*, to bring us to heaven. The law is a *mirror* to reflect our sinfulness, and not a *laver* to cleanse our guilt. Looking into this holy and perfect law, we see our true image as sinners—but, washing in the atoning

blood of Jesus, we are cleansed from all sin. Joshua, therefore, signifies *Jesus*, because he temporally *saved* the children of Israel by conducting them fully into Canaan; and so it was said of our blessed Saviour, "*His name shall be called* JESUS, *for He shall* SAVE *His people from their sins.*"

But, in addition to his civil relation to the Church of God, Joshua filled the sacred office of a *Christian minister;* he was, as it were, a priest over his own house, and hence it was a *pious* house. It was here, amidst its hallowed influences, doubtless, that his personal piety was nourished, his religious character was nurtured, and his spirit was trained and encouraged to undertake and achieve great things for God and for His Church. He lived in degenerate times,—amidst much laxity of morals and religious declension, against which he was enabled, by the grace of God, to oppose a powerful and decided resistance. The children of Israel were proud, vacillating, and rebellious. To them he addressed the solemn, searching words, "*Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. Put away the strange gods which are among you, and incline your hearts unto the Lord God of Israel.*" And then appealing to his own personal and solemn decision, he gave utterance to the noble sentiment of our text. Whatever religious declension might exist with the body politic, however the people of the land should pervert their

ways, decline from the fear of the Most High, forsake His ordinances, and set up strange gods in their dwellings, and so corrupt and destroy their households,—there yet should be *one* home consecrated to God,—one sanctuary within which true piety should find a retreat,—one safe asylum for real religion,—one altar upon which should glow the fire of faith and virtue, of devotion and love to God.—"AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD." He had vowed to the Lord, that both he and his should be on the Lord's side, and from that vow he would not go back. He could not rule the State nor command the Church to the extent that he wished; but he could be the minister of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ *in his own home*,—among his own kindred; and he was resolved that, personally and relatively, both he and his house should serve the Lord. If all the tribes of Israel had determined to leave God,—if all the families of these separate tribes had determined to forsake the sanctuary and abjure the worship of the Most High, yet this pious parent's heart was fixed, his mind was determined; he would dare to be singular, and to stand alone, though the thousands who had cast off the fear of Jehovah should bend upon him their contemptuous frown. "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" Holy and magnanimous resolve!

Let us first contemplate the sphere of Joshua's religion: it was his HOME. Next to the Church of God,

the most sacred enclosure, and the most important and precious institution, is the *domestic.* Home is a hallowed and endeared spot. No earthly association can be so important or interesting as a *family.* Here exist the closest relations, here flow the warmest affections, and here are experienced the tenderest sympathies. It is here the painter finds the most touching subject for his pencil; and the poet the sweetest inspiration of his song. Whatever loneliness reigns in other communities, or clouds shade other spots, there is always companionship and sunshine *here.* But this is not all that constitutes a happy home. Although the family connection may be viewed as the only sanctuary of earthly bliss, we cannot blind our eyes to the fact that *sin* has invaded its sanctity, poisoning its joys, marring its loveliness, and shading its brightness. There may, it is true, be much that is amiable and attractive where nothing exists but the natural affections, clothed in their native simplicty, and regulated by refined education; but, apart from *home piety,* severed from the *Christian* graces shedding their heavenly influence over the family circle, all this loveliness of nature fades into the cold light of an inanimate picture,—the colour is brilliant, and the figures expressive, but the whole wants *life!* The body is fair and symmetrical, but the *soul*—the living image of God—is absent.

I have referred to the *importance* of the family in-

stitution: it cannot be exaggerated. It is here that human life begins, and often closes, its earthly pilgrimage; here it is trained for this world, and disciplined for the world that is to come; here the seeds of thought are sown, and the young ideas are taught to shoot; here the germs of those principles are implanted that are to regulate all the future of our being; here the boy is trained to be the man; and the bud of feminine virtue and loveliness, beneath the warm sunlight of a parent's eye, blooms into the full-blown flower of the future woman. Here, too, is the cradle of *greatness*. From this sacred ark, the Pulpit and the Bench, the Senate, the University, and the National Service draw the great men by whom their ranks are replenished and enriched. But, transcending in importance is the truth that, the family of man is the nursery of the family of God—the earthly home is the school of the home of heaven. Within the domestic garden God is training His trees of righteousness,—the plants and flowers of paradise. There are, perhaps, few of God's children who are not able to trace some of their earliest and deepest serious thoughts and religious impressions, the formation of sacred tastes and habits, which, in subsequent life, exerted so happy a control, to the influence and ministry of a *religious home*. It was home instruction that sowed the seed, home influence that promoted its growth, and home example that gave to the bud its existence, to the flower its perfection, and to the tree its shape.

The relation of the Christian family to the Christian Church is of the closest and most solemn nature. It is both the type and the nursery of the Church. The Church rises out of the family, to which it is strikingly and beautifully analagous. Thus Christian parents are the nursing-fathers and the nursing-mothers of the Church. I do not know of a more touching and impressive argument for the cultivation of "*piety at home*," than this. Let every pious family keep this thought prominently before it,—We are contributing to the upbuilding of that glorious Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood; from our sacred enclosure she is transferring to her own our sons and daughters,—destined, in their turn, to supply an endless succession of the "holy seed" to the Church of our "*Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*" Here is an argument for family religion, and a plea for the ministry of home, cogent and irresistible! Honoured and happy parents, who live to see the precious seed of truth and piety you sowed in early years—perchance with "*strong crying and tears*"—now yielding so rich a harvest. Your "*sons as plants, grown up in their youth; and your daughters as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.*[a] Such will ever be the fruit of *the ministry of home.* Viewed in this point of light, what sacred spots, what centres of influence, what sources of power,

[a] Psalm cxliv. 12.

and what founts of happiness are *religious homes!* They may be humble and obscure; often embittered with domestic affliction and darkened with the clouds of adversity,—the pressure of want, the anxiety of sickness, the shadow of bereavement may seldom be absent; and yet they are *religious*, and therefore *happy* homes! Christian love unites the members, God's fear rules their hearts, His Word is the light in the dwelling, and the peace which Jesus gives shades with its balmy wing the sacred circle.

> "Better than gold is a Christian home,
> Where all the fireside charities come:
> The shrine of love, the haven of life,—
> Hallowed by mother, or sister, or wife.
> However humble the home may be,
> Or tried with sorrow by heaven's decree—
> The blessings, that ne'er were bought or sold,
> And centre there, are better than gold."

Nor must we entirely overlook the moral relation of the Christian family *to the State:* it is close and vital. As families compose the fabric of the State, so the State derives its character and stability from the moral and religious character of those families. The Commonwealth will be what its *domestic* institution makes it. When society cease to be moulded into families, and families cease to be sanctified by religion, "Ichabod" may be written upon the State—for its glory and its stability will have departed! The family consti-

tution is a vast moral power, and may be employed as an engine for good or for evil to an incalculable extent. Compare the moral and religious condition of England and Scotland with Spain and France; then, institute an inquiry into the *domestic* economy of each, and it will not be difficult to arrive at the cause of so vast a moral difference between nations, in other respects equally great and noble. In France and in Spain the *family* enclosure is invaded by a foreign foe, styled the Director, or Spiritual Guide; and the family hearth has ceased to be the corner-stone of God's own domestic institution, and both the temple of home and the edifice of religion are eaten at the very core, and sapped at the very base by "the canker-worm of many a gentle heart."[b] But both of England and Scotland, as of other Protestant countries, it may be said of this sheltering vine—the family constitution—as was beautifully said of the Jewish Church of old,—"*Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.*"[c] I return to the thought—Christian families constitute the nursery of the Christian Church, and the Christian Church con-

[b] "Priests, Women, and Families." By M. Michelet.

[c] Psalm lxxx. 9—11.

stitutes the conservator of the State. A nation in which the Domestic Economy is lightly estimated, or whose families are destitute of *religion*—in which no domestic altar is reared, where God's Word is discarded, and household instruction is neglected, and family government is prostrated,—will, in spite of fervent preaching, and popular education, and costly philanthropy, naturally and inevitably lead to bad government, a dissolute people, the prevalence of social wrong, religious paralysis, and moral death. On the other hand, let society be built up into *families;* let those families be organized upon, and be regulated by, the principles of God's Word; let the head be a king, a priest, and a prophet in its midst; let parental authority be maintained, and filial obedience be observed; —in a word, let them be homes in which God is feared, Christ is confessed, the Sabbath is hallowed, and piety is nurtured, and we shall behold the reverse of the sad picture I have sketched;—a sound Commonwealth, a healthy Government, a peaceful community, advancing religion, a prosperous Church, and a happy country. Of what moment, then, that our domestic constitution should be moulded by vital godliness,—that family government should be based upon the precepts of the Bible,—that home-life should be sanctified by the spirit of holiness, and that our households should be sanctuaries of God: parents, children, servants, all forming *the Church in the house.* "*Blessed is every one*

that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord. The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel."[d] Such was the *sphere* of Joshua's religion. Let us now look at his religion itself.

It began with *himself.* "As for *me.*" The parent is the head of the family—its sovereignty of authority and government. A *father's* position is one of immense power and responsibility. How important that he should be a man of God—a priest in his own house! Here the *ministry of home* has its seat. Home piety seldom rises above the parental standard; *like* father, *like* children. It was a noble testimony to Abraham's paternal piety which Jehovah bore, when He said of him,—"*I know that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*"[e] Of what infinite moment, then, that the father of a family should be a Christian man,—that his influence should be sanctified, and his example sanctifying; that his religion should be the religion of the Bible, which is the religion of Jesus; and that his

[d] Psalm cxxviii. 1—6. [e] Gen. xviii. 19.

domestic life should be a "*burning and a shining light,*" shedding its softening, hallowing influence upon all the relations, and duties, and members of home.

Not less important is the domestic position of the *mother*. A mother's influence is proverbial; it cannot be too highly valued, nor too warmly appreciated. She is the central power of home. She may not be called the *head* of the family, but its *heart* she certainly is; and though not *de jure*, yet *de facto*, she is its head. To her hands the interests of the family are chiefly confided; on her the happiness of home mainly depends. She it is who supplies the Church with its brightest ornaments, the pulpit with its holiest ministers, the state with its strongest pillars. She shapes the destiny of future generations; and if she is a holy woman—a praying mother, trusting in God, and faithful to her mission—there is not a strong and a brave man battling with the world, guiding the state, or toiling for the Church, who is not, like Antœus,[f] all the stronger, the braver, and the happier, by the power of her influence, the music of her voice, and the memory of her love.

Of what moment, then, that the mother should be a godly, Christ-loving, praying woman! "*A child left to*

[f] "But still when by his victor pressed,
Fell back upon his *mother's* breast;
And gathered from his source of life
New vigour for the strife."

itself," says Solomon, "*bringeth its mother to shame.*" Why the *mother*, and not the *father?* Because the early mental and spiritual training of that child—the development and mould of its character were more especially confided to its *mother's* hands; she becomes, as it were, responsible for its future course. The man is what the child was; and the child is what a mother's teaching, prayers, and example make it. The history of a *pious mother's* influence is one of the most instructive and interesting the Church-historian ever compiled. In addition to the sacred history of Moses and Samuel, of John the Baptist and Timothy, we might refer to at least a majority of the twelve Apostles of Jesus as the offspring of holy women; who, though moving in the humbler ranks of life, possessed the patent of a higher nobility than man could confer, in that they belonged to the devout women of old who waited in the temple for the "Consolation of Israel." They were holy women, therefore they were *praying* mothers; and it is utterly impossible that the prayers and early pious instruction of a Christian mother can be entirely lost. Let one or two examples suffice:—

A weak and sickly infant was once launched into life. He was the last of a family of twenty children. So frail and helpless seemed this little boy that he was laid aside as one that was dead. A mother's quick eye, however, detected signs of animation, and her warm bosom roused the sinking pulse, and her sleepless care

won back the life doomed to destruction. He grew up a sickly child, of feeble constitution and pulmonary tendencies. And yet that little sickly, consumptive boy was the embryo of a great and holy man. Hidden in that fragile frame were germs of great intellectual power, —one of the noblest, loveliest, and most commanding spirits that ever animated our humanity. Sitting upon her lap, his pious mother was wont to interest and instruct her frail sickly child from the china Dutch tiles which ornamented the chimney-piece of her humble room, upon which were rudely yet truthfully traced various Scripture histories. Thus, when he could read, the mind of her pupil was well stored with a large amount of Scripture knowledge, both of the Old and the New Testaments. Referring to this interesting fact when grown to be a great and good man, he says,—"The wise and pious reflections which she made upon these stories were the means of enforcing such good impressions on my heart as never were worn out." Such was the basis upon which in after years rose one of the noblest Christian characters, and such the nucleus around which were gathered those holy principles and lovely thoughts, and yet lovelier disposition, which through forty years of suffering life shed their holy light and influence upon countless other minds. And as long as the Church on earth lasts, and vital godliness is admired, and religious truth influences, "Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the

Soul," will never die. And when you consult the Biblical Commentary, and sing the Spiritual Hymns, and trace the progress of experimental religion as they flowed from the pen of Philip Doddridge, pause, and bless the memory of that mother whose hands sowed the precious seed which in after years yielded so golden, so great a harvest,—and yields it still!

One of the most interesting annals of the Christian Church would be a compilation illustrating the power and success of a *mother's prayers.* Recently a young sailor, the son of pious parents, left his boarding-house in one of our large cities, bent on a sinful excursion. On his way he passed a mission station, where a religious service was being held. Attracted by the sound of music, but doubtless influenced by the Spirit of God upon his heart, he was induced to enter. The truth which he then heard was brought home with a quickening and converting power to his soul; and he went to sea again a new creature in Christ Jesus. On his return voyage, he found, on his arrival, a letter awaiting him at the Post Office: it was from his mother, announcing the heavy tidings of his father's death. She informed him that on her retiring from his grave she bowed at the throne of grace in a special and importunate prayer for the conversion of her absent child. On comparing dates, the sailor-boy discovered that that earnest prayer was ascending to God from the stricken heart of his widowed mother *at the very time*

that he was so strangely led to the mission service, and from thence went to sea with a new song of salvation in his mouth. Well may this converted sailor ask, as with deep emotion he related the circumstance of his conversion, "Can any one doubt the efficacy of prayer?" Christian mothers! your child may be far away from the sheltering home, voyaging on the stormy sea, or dwelling in some distant clime beyond your voice. But he is still within the reach of the mightiest power a mother can wield—the power of *prayer!* And although you cannot throw around him your maternal arms to shield him from the evil of the world, you can invest him with your wrestling believing petitions, and secure on his behalf the Arm which encircles the globe, and is mighty to save. Oh that the Church of God may be filled with such *praying mothers!*

But the religion of home, though it naturally begins with the head—the *united* head of the family—is not to remain there. Joshua would not serve the Lord alone. His noble resolution embraced *all* his belongings. "Me and *my house.*" He was not content with his own personal religion and devotedness. He was not satisfied to go to heaven himself, indifferent to, and unaccompanied by, those who stood to him in so close, tender, and responsible a relation as children and domestics. If he had ceased to be a leader, he had not ceased to be a parent. Nor did he merge his

personal in his official duties, and in serving as a minister the Church of God, forget that he was a minister to the Church in his own house. It is sadly to be deplored that many of Christ's ministering servants, and also many private heads of families, are so completely engrossed by the public, and absorbed by official and professional engagements, as to leave almost entirely neglected, or but slovenly performed, the *ministry of home.* "He made me keeper of the vineyards; but *mine own vineyard* have I not kept," may well be the lamentation of many officially connected with the Church of God.

But what an illustrious example of supreme devotedness to God in all the relations of life, domestic and official, have we before us! No office-bearer in the Church was ever called to a higher post, to more exacting duties, or to a weightier responsibility than Joshua! And yet this was his noble resolve—"*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!*" Official engagements were not allowed to override individual responsibility; nor were the claims of the Church permitted to set aside those of the family. The interests of the tribes of Israel did not interfere with those of his household, nor the reponsibilites which attached to his official relation to the Church of God, crucify the obligations and duties which bound him to the home of his heart. Weary from the public duties appertaining to the sacred tribes, like David, after settling the restored

ark, he "*returned to bless his household.*"[g] And not to bless them only, but to *be blessed,*—to experience within its sacred bosom the soothing and repose found only there, amid the anxieties, chafings, and jadedness of official and public life. What an ark of wealth—what a haven of safety—what a pillow of rest is a Christian home, whose the motto is,—"*We will serve the Lord!*"

The whole subject resolves itself into a conclusion pregnant with the most weighty and solemn thought: that real religion—the religion of Christ—is the true conservative principle—the only true safeguard—of a home. It was the astute remark of an eminent divine of a former age, "A family *without religion* is like a house without a roof, exposed to every storm." And of another who, at a later period, when referring to the advantage of *family prayer*, speaks of it as, "The border which keeps the web of daily life from unravelling." Can the Christian mind picture to itself a spectacle more melancholy than that of a family *without vital religion?*—the circle being wholly for this world, without any consideration of the world to come. It is devoted intently and supremely to the pursuits and pleasures, to the gaieties and enjoyments of this life; it has no thought beyond the gratification of its own selfishness. Time is devoted to dress and fashion, to the ball, the theatre, the opera, and the gratification of sense. Its tastes may be refined, its man-

[g] 2 Samuel vi. 20.

ners polished, its mind cultivated and intelligent; there are not wanting affection, sympathy, assimilation of tastes, concord, and mutual well-pleasing: but it is a "home without a roof,"—it is entirely destitute of the hallowing, softening, ennobling influence of *religion*. God is not feared, Christ is not confessed, the saints are not recognized by the members of that family; the Gospel of Jesus is scorned, the name of God profaned, and the subject of religion tabbooed as distasteful, or banished as a bore. Am I drawing a too highly coloured picture? Then, take a family decidedly of the world, yet with some semblance of religion. Prayers may be read, the house of God frequented, the Sacrament observed—and this is all! With this outward form of godliness there is no world-crucifying, sin-mortifying power. The one is still in the ascendant, and the other maintains the mastery; and, with all its sacred profession and form, it is still a family without religion—a family without God! Contemplate the future—the eternal *future* of that family! One by one passes away into eternity; the silver-haired sire, the venerable mother, the manly son, the beautiful daughter,—each and all without an interest in Christ, without the converting grace of the Spirit, without a good hope of heaven: and all to meet again in the world of woe, to deplore their folly, and to rue in endless suffering and mutual reproach their fatal choice. O there is something in the thought too appalling for

the mind to dwell upon—a whole family passing unprepared into eternity!—lost, for ever *lost!* Truly, a family destitute of vital religion has no covering amid the pitiless, pelting storms of this world's adversities, and no shelter from the eternal storm of Divine wrath in the world that is to come. But it is not too late earnestly and prayerfully to seek family religion. Fairly and in good faith try the experiment. Enthrone God supremely upon the domestic altar; make Him the centre of your family,—to whom your first and last thoughts shall converge, from whom your chief happiness shall flow, and in whom all your highest and noblest actions shall end. Seek the converting power of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifying grace of Christ Jesus. Put away from you the strange household gods you worship—an infidel and frivolous literature—immodest works of art—the card playing—the private theatricals—the licentious dance—with *everything* inconsistent with a *Christian* home,—a home regulated and sanctified by the holy, unearthly, unworldly religion of Jesus; and let this be the all-governing principle of your home,—"*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" Listen to the invitation of God,—"*Come thou and all thy house into the Ark.*"

Let not any neglect, as Christian parents, of the religious duties of home,—any indifference to the moral and spiritual welfare of our children and servants,—any too fond parental indulgence or allowance of wil-

ful filial disobedience,—any sanction given to Sabbath desecration, or neglect of Bible study, or ignoring of the family altar,—give countenance or weight to the popular, I had almost said vulgar, notion that the children of ministers of the Gospel, and those of Christian parents, are the worst trained in Christian knowledge, and the most lax in the religious principles, precepts, and duties of life,—in a word, are the most irreligious children of society! The accusation I believe to be wrong in theory and unfounded in fact. Nevertheless, let not this shadow rest upon our domestic escutcheon through our too great absorption in public life, to an exclusion of the claims and power of *the ministry of home.* "*We will serve the Lord!*" This is the noblest end of life—be this our aim! What Christian parent longs not that this should be the distinctive feature of his house? Of what infinite moment that you should be a truly converted parent, loving God, and serving the Lord Jesus Christ! O consider your parental responsibility, the force of your teaching, the power of your example, the influence of your whole life in moulding the future destiny of your household. Let not your children have reason to curse your memory; but, rather, when the clods of the valley press lightly upon you, may they rise up and call you blessed! As a Christian parent, then, you have every encouragement to persevere in carrying out the noble resolution, "*As for me and my house, we will serve*

the Lord." The promise is to you and to your children—and oh what a promise it is—"*I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*" Plead that great and precious promise in faith, and God will make it good, and shower upon your domestic circle such blessings as He only can bestow—such as shall cheer and hallow your dwelling now, and enrich you and yours hereafter. Happy home! when religion is the all-ruling, all-pervading power. All is harmony and peace within its sacred enclosure. Animated by one and the same holy religion of Jesus, and travelling the same road to Zion, the members of such a family take sweet council together, and are helpers of each other's joy. The natural asperities of temper are softened, discordant feelings and interests are harmonized, coldness and selfishness are banished, and the domestic circle becomes an emblem of heaven. Into *that* heaven all shall finally enter, and eternally meet! Think not that this holy circle, where Christ's cementing love was felt, and by whom God was worshipped with the beauty of holiness, are, when they go hence, for ever lost to each other. Oh no! that pious family shall meet again, to go no more out for ever; but to enjoy, with cherubim and seraphim and with the spirits of just men made perfect, unmingled happiness, perennial joy, and immortal glory. Thrice blessed family! You made the happy choice, and formed the noble resolution that you would serve the Lord. Yours was the wisdom

not to set your affections upon the riches, the honours, or the pleasures which endure but for a moment, but on things eternal,—on God, on Christ, on holiness, on heaven. You preferred affliction with the people of God, to the pleasures of sin for a season. You chose the despised LAMB as your pattern. You followed His steps, bore His cross, did His service; and He sustained you in every trial, soothed you in grief, was with you in death, and has now planted your feet triumphantly on Mount Zion. Such is the golden, everlasting fruit of—THE MINISTRY OF HOME!

"Father of all! Thy care we bless,
Which crowns our families with peace;
From Thee they spring, and by Thy hand
They have been and are still sustain'd.

To God, most worthy to be praised,
Be our domestic altar raised;
Who, Lord of heaven, scorns not to dwell
With saints in their obscurest cell.

To Thee may each united house
Morning and night present its vows;
Our servants there, and rising race,
Are taught Thy precepts and Thy grace.

Oh, may each future age proclaim
The honour of Thy glorious name;
While, pleased and thankful, we remove
To join the family above."

THE DESIRE TO SEE JESUS.

JOHN xii. 21.

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

THOSE who originally made this deeply interesting request were Grecian proselytes to the Jewish religion. Nurtured as they had been amid the abominations of their national idolatry, they yet had received sufficient light to form some estimate of the Hebrew religion, and their hearts cordially embraced it. Now, however, they hear of another religion other than the Jewish, and of another Teacher other than Moses. His fame had reached their ears. They heard that He was filling all Jerusalem with the excitement of His doctrine and with the wonder of His works. They were told that He taught as one having authority, and not as the Scribes. That He opened the ears of the deaf to the sweet sounds of melody; that He poured the golden light of day upon the sightless eyeball; that, at a single word, the paralytic cast from him his crutch, and leaped as an hart; that the tongue which had never articulated an intelligent sound, at His touch poured forth its

sweetest praise; that diseases which had long existed —baffling all human skill, and wasting all earthly substance—fled at His command; and that even the dead—shrouded and entombed for days—at His voice rose from their graves, and lived again in all the vigour and freshness of youth. Hearing of these wonderful works, these proselytes embarked upon a journey to Jerusalem to verify their truth, and yet more, to see the wonderful Being who had wrought them. Finding two of Christ's disciples, they presented their request: "*We would see Jesus.*" The result is not recorded. But of this we may be assured that, if their inquiry was spiritual and not carnal,—if their search for Jesus was earnest and not speculative, the promises were fulfilled in their experience: "*They that seek Me shall find Me. Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. He hath not said to the seeking seed of Jacob, Seek ye My face in vain.*" Doubtless they found Jesus, and henceforth followed Him. From this suggestive incident let us turn to ourselves. Is there nothing in the interesting inquiry of these Greeks—nothing in the object of their search spiritually instructive to our minds? Nothing to awaken a yet deeper and holier echo in our hearts: "*We would see Jesus*"? Oh yes, there is much! May the Holy Spirit aid and bless us while I endeavour to present the Object of sight,—then show what are some of the states of mind to which this

important inquiry will apply,—concluding with a reference to the hallowed and practical effect of a spiritual and believing sight of Jesus. O holy and eternal Spirit! Author of spiritual life, from whom all light and truth emanate, take not only of the things of Jesus and show them unto us, but reveal to us JESUS Himself as a personal Saviour,—that, with a spiritual eye we may see Him, and seeing, may admire Him; and admiring, may love Him; and loving, may follow, serve, and honour Him all the days of our life.

The *Object* of sight is JESUS. He is the most wonderful as He is the most glorious Being in the universe. He is the Essential Son of the Father, co-equal and co-eternal; of the same Divine essence as the Father, the Maker of all worlds and the Creator of all beings; "*Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things exist.*" It is Jesus who died for sinners on the cross, rose from the dead for our justification, and ascended up on high and sat down at the right hand of God, from whence He will come again to receive His Church, and to judge the world in righteousness. Angels worship Him, saints love Him, devils fear Him, the world despises and rejects Him; but to them

that believe He is precious—the "*chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely;*" and "*to them that look for Him will He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*" Such, in a few words, is the Object of the sinner's spiritual sight. No other saving object is presented to us in the Gospel—it is JESUS only. It is JESUS the divinest, the greatest, the most glorious and lovely Being in the universe. There is but *one* Friend of sinners, but one Saviour of the lost, but one Star of Bethlehem—it is JESUS. God has concentrated all glory and grace and beauty in Christ. Look *to* Him and you are saved; look *from* Him and you are lost!

"*We would see Jesus.*" And first, this is the inquiry of *the penitent soul.* So soon as the Holy Spirit convinces a man of sin, opens the chamber of imagery, makes known the plague, and reveals the original and deep depravity of the heart—sins exceeding the hue of scarlet, and outnumbering the sands of the sea-shore, —there is at once a newly discovered *want* in the soul —a strange and deeply felt *need*, such as nothing seen within or found without can meet. And what is that necessity? It is the deeply, intensely felt *need of a Saviour.* Jesus is now the *want* of the soul; Jesus, and nothing less and nothing more. Awakened to a conviction of its ruined, self-destroyed, and lost condition, the desire and yearnings of the heart now go forth after *one* object—Jesus, the Saviour and Friend

of poor sinners. His language is, "I would see Jesus; I would see Him as my sin-bearer; I would see Him suffering, dying, and as rising again in my stead as my surety and substitute. I would see Him as discharging all my great debt to Law and Justice; as making my peace with God; as cleansing me in His blood, and as clothing me with His righteousness; thus bringing me into a state of present salvation, peace, and hope." If such is the true desire of your soul, my reader, the Gospel just meets your case. It is the mirror that reflects the person of Jesus; it is the frame that contains the likeness of Jesus; it is the setting that encloses the beauty, and lustre, and glory of Jesus—this priceless, precious jewel. Penitent soul! weeping over thy sins, bemoaning thy transgressions, lying in the dust before God—self-abased, self-abhorred—look up and see Jesus bending over thee in all the gracious compassion of His heart, speaking in accents of the tenderest love,—"*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that are bound; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.*" Look unto Me. Behold My hands and My feet, pierced by and for thy sins: believe and be saved.

"*We would see Jesus*" is the inquiry of the *believing* soul. Christ once seen by faith becomes an object of ever growing desire. The believing soul is never satisfied with the sight it has had of Jesus. The Apostle Paul saw Jesus as none of the others had seen Him; and yet this was still his great desire, "*that I may know Him.*" Thus the desires of the renewed soul after Christ are unlimited and insatiable, and will never be satisfied until it beholds Him in glory; nor even then! Eternity will be occupied with Jesus—in contemplating His person, in admiring His beauty, in beholding His glory, in studying His work, and in sweetly chanting His high praise. But the Christ-loving soul wants to realize more of Jesus now—more of His love and loveliness; more of His grace and graciousness; more of the fitness and completeness of His sacrifice; more of His manifested presence and sacred communion. There does not exist a stronger evidence of our union with Christ, and of our interest in His salvation than this one ardent desire of the soul after Him. Our views and thoughts and aspirations concerning Jesus constitute the true test of the spiritual state of our souls. Wrong apprehensions of the person of Jesus, and false principles in relation to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus are fatal to our everlasting well-being. There is but *one* way to heaven,—if we walk not in that way we cannot reach heaven. There is but *one* Door of salvation—if we enter not into

that Door we cannot be saved. If I set out for a given point, and diverge into a road that conducts me to an opposite one, it is no marvel that, mistaking, either through ignorance or wilful blindness, my way, I never reach my intended destination. We are all travelling—solemn thought!—to eternity, and thousands hope to reach heaven who have never taken a step in the *right* road. They have never been convinced of sin, have never felt their need of Christ, have never seen their lost and undone condition as sinners, have never been divested of their self-righteousness; in a word, have never fled to Jesus with the agonizing cry, "*Lord, save or I perish! God be merciful to me a sinner!*". Is it any marvel that all such miss eternal happiness at last? that, when they have finished their solemn and eventful journey, instead of finding themselves in heaven, they find themselves in hell,—the dread and interminable abode of all who walked not in the narrow way that leadeth unto life, but along the broad way that leadeth unto destruction. Jesus said, "*I am the Way;*" and all who are walking in *this* Way by faith,—however feeble that faith, and trembling the footsteps, and slow the progress,—shall yet reach heaven at last; shall tread its golden streets, and breathe its fragrant air; shall eat its precious fruit, and drink its crystal waters; and, with an assembly which no man can number, out of every tongue and nation and people, shall sing for ever the praises of the Lamb.

Let this, then, evidence the reality of your conversion, and the healthfulness of your growing state; viz., your longings after Christ, your deepening desire to see more of Jesus, to have more real transaction with Him by faith, closer fellowship with Him in prayer, and to exalt Him more warmly and supremely upon the throne of your love.

And such, too, is the burden of *the tried and afflicted soul: "We would see Jesus."* How partially is Jesus experimentally known by the believing soul whose path lies not through trial and tribulation. There must of necessity be much of His official history, much of His personal character, much of His varied relations to His people, veiled from the heart not acquainted with suffering and sorrow. Jesus was a Sufferer—a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. To know Him intimately and experimentally as such, to have fellowship with Him in suffering, and to be made conformable to His death, we must be, as He was, made perfect through suffering. *"Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."* Now it is thus—tried, tempted, chastened—we feel an earnest, pining desire to see Jesus. We want to see Him ordaining the trial; we want to see Him shaping the affliction; we want to see Him in the tribulation—we want Him to be treading the fiery furnace at our side. Thus, like Joseph, we become *"fruitful in the land of our affliction."* Many lovely flowers, many

clusters of precious fruit grow upon the rude, rough stem of affliction: and none more beauteous or costly than this—the closer acquaintance into which it brings the soul with Jesus. None but a sight of the Saviour meets the case now. Sickness has rendered insipid the sweetness of the world; bereavement has draped the sunlight of life; adversity has scattered, as with wintry blast, the flower and foliage of domestic happiness, and the heart is withered like grass, and existence seems as shrouded for the tomb. *One* desire yet lives amid the torn affections, *one* hope yet blossoms amid the blighted desolation, *one* blessing yet survives the wreck of earthly joys—it is the heart's, single, holy, and intense prayer—"*I would see Jesus!*" Welcome blest affliction, that has led to a result so hallowed! thrice blessed sorrow in which the heart, torn and bleeding, the spirit shaded and sad, turns, pining and pensive to Him who has smitten! It is your privilege to see Jesus in your present calamity. It comes not alone; it looks dark and angry; it is felt to be heavy and crushing; but Jesus is seated in the cloud-chariot, Jesus holds the helm of the foundering bark; Jesus is in the centre of the burning bush, and you are safe. Much of your succour and comfort will distil from the realized truth that Christ, invisible, yet not less real, is in your present sorrow,—for He is not only *all* to His people, but He is *in all* their individual history. He is in every beam that enlightens, in every cloud that

shades, in every incident that embitters, in every circumstance that gives a new bend and tint to their life. And if this affliction but result in your closer intimacy with Jesus, in making His love, sufficiency, and compassion better known by you, you will reap the fruit of it through time, and praise Him for it through eternity.

The sincere and devout *communicant* approaches the Lord's table with this language breathing from the heart,—"*I would see Jesus.*" For what other purpose was the Lord's Supper instituted, but that through this window of grace we might behold the Lord Himself? It is essential to right communicating that we should have Scriptural and spiritual views of the ordinance. The Lord's Supper is but a sign and a symbol. It possesses, intrinsically, no spiritual efficacy; it conveys, communicatively, no sacramental grace; it neither imparts spiritual life nor sustains it; it neither sanctifies nor saves. It is but the sacred memorial of a dying Saviour, the precious memento of a loving Friend, the expressive picture of a suffering Christ,—which we are to cherish, observe, and study in remembrance of Him until He come. As such, the Lord's Supper is a precious means of grace, a sacred channel of sweet refreshment and strength, endearing to us Jesus, cherishing in our hearts the expectation of His second appearing. Let us, then, approach the Lord's Supper with this one sentiment and prayer

breathing from our hearts, "*I would see Jesus.*" I would see Him, by faith, standing in the open window of this ordinance, bending upon me His eye of love through the lattice, awaking the response of faith in my heart, "*He hath loved me, and hath given Himself for me.*" How blessed and enrapturing is this sight of Jesus! It is Jesus in His most endearing form, His most winning attitude, His most expressive image. Behold Him by faith in the bread, as giving His flesh for your nourishment; behold Him by faith in the cup, as shedding His blood for your sins. Approach this banquet desiring only to see Jesus; if He is not there, presiding at His own table, it were a blank and meanless ceremony. But Jesus *is* there to welcome and commune with His saints. And if you humbly and believingly approach with the request, "I would see Jesus in this ordinance, I would see Him in His beauty, I would see Him as my Beloved, I would see Him as my Sacrifice, I would see Him as saying to me, 'What is thy request? Ask, and I will grant it thee,'"—the elevated experience of your soul shall be, "*While the King sitteth at His table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.*" A poor, half-witted boy, who had evidently manifested a tendency towards religious and devotional feelings, asked permission to partake of the Holy Communion with other members of the congregation. The clergyman demurred for some time, under the impression of his

mind being incapable of a right understanding of the sacred ordinance. But observing the extreme earnestness of the poor boy, at last gave consent. He was much affected, and all the way home from church was heard to exclaim, "Oh! I have seen the pretty man!" This referred to his seeing the Lord Jesus, whom he had approached in the sacrament. He kept repeating the words, and went with them on his lips to rest for the night. Not appearing at the usual hour for breakfast, when they went to his bedside they found him dead! The excitement had been too much—mind and body had given way—and the half-idiot of earth awoke to the glories and bliss of his Redeemer's presence.

"I love the windows of Thy grace
Through which my Lord is seen;
And long to meet my Saviour's face
Without a glass between.

"O that the happy hour was come
To change my faith to sight;
I shall behold my Lord at home
In a diviner light.

"Haste, my Beloved! and remove
These interposing days;
Then shall my passions all be love
And all my powers be praise."

"*We would see Jesus,*" is the language of the *dying Christian.* Faith in Jesus changes the entire character and appearance of death. Jesus is our *life.* Entering the soul by the Spirit, Jesus breathes into it the

breath of spiritual life, and so the believer becomes in the highest sense a *living* soul. Having dislodged spiritual death from the *soul*, Jesus then changes the character of the death of the *body;* and thus the departure of the believer out of this life is not so much a death, as it is a sweet, calm, peaceful *sleep*. Death in its most appalling aspect, its bitterness and sting, retires from the scene, and one object alone is visible—it is JESUS the Life. Thus, the believer *lives in death*. Death, mortally wounded by Christ when He died, now itself expires,—while his victim, whose mortal existence it has terminated, springs into glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life! Fear not, then, O believer, the hour of your approaching departure: by faith you shall not see death. "*Whoso believeth in My words shall not see death.*" Shall not *see* it! What, then, shall he see? Upon whom will those eyes, now glazing and darkening with the film of death, fix their exclusive, their last and latest gaze? Upon JESUS,—once Death's illustrious Victim, now Death's triumphant Conqueror! Who can look calmly upon death now, and hopefully upon him when he actually uplifts his dart to strike us down, but as he sees Jesus? Upon what a lovely, what a loving, what a powerful object does the departing saint fix his dying gaze! Jesus, the chief among ten thousand; Jesus, full of grace, and overflowing with love; Jesus, assuring us that whoso liveth and believeth in Him shall never die;

Jesus, showing us in His hands, and feet, and side, the tokens of His love and the evidences of our pardon. Jesus bidding us fear not, and standing ready to receive our departing spirit. Such is the object of spiritual sight.

Let us now briefly advert to the *sanctifying influence* of this spiritual and blessed view of Jesus upon the believing mind.

First, it is a *soul-elevating sight:* it is the sight of God in Jesus. Jesus came into this world as much to *reveal* God as to *save* man. He assured Thomas, "*He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.*" And the Apostle says,—"*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined on our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" What more divine, more elevating sight than this—God manifest in Jesus! The saints in heaven may behold this wondrous spectacle bathed in richer glory, with clearer views; but not less real nor less precious is it to the believing saints on earth. Jesus said, "*No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him.*" In Jesus we see God pardoning sin, and accepting the sinner. We see God pacified towards us, for all that we have done, and bending upon us the eye of a forgiving, reconciled Father. O what a soul-elevating spectacle is this! It raises us above the guilt of sin, the fear of death, the dread of condemnation,—above sorrow and trial, suffering and persecution; it inspires us with a supe-

riority to all present ill, fills the soul with the anticipation of all future good, and lifts it into the region, and bathes it in the atmosphere of another and a holier world. O study this spectacle of God revealed in Jesus—seen in Jesus, near to you in Jesus—would you live a hidden and an elevated life. The loftiest, the most intellectual and sublime contemplation of earth will but attract you *earthward;* but the spiritual, prayerful, believing study of this Divine wonder—God in Jesus adopting, pardoning, justifying sinners; adopting, pardoning, saving *you*—will attract you, raise you, wing you *heavenward;* and so dwelling in the region and atmosphere of heaven your mind, affections, and desires will grow *heavenly.*

The sight of Jesus is a *soul-satisfying* spectacle. The penitent soul is satisfied, for it sees in Jesus a free pardon of sin; the condemned soul is satisfied, for it receives in Jesus a free justification; the believing soul is satisfied, for it discovers in Jesus a fountain of all grace; the tried, tempted, sorrowful soul is satisfied, for it experiences in Jesus all consolation, sympathy and love. O, what an *all-satisfying* Portion is Jesus! He satisfies every holy desire, for He realizes it; He satisfies every craving want, for He supplies it; He satisfies every sore grief, for He soothes it; He satisfies the deepest yearnings, the highest aspirations, the sublimest hopes of the renewed soul, for all these centre and end in Him. Art thou inquiring, "Who will show me any

good?" Hast thou distilled from every flower, and sipped from every spring, and drawn upon every resource, and still feel dissatisfied with the world,—with the creature, yet more with yourself? Behold, in Jesus an all-satisfying Friend! One believing sight of Him, one taste of His graciousness, one beam of His love, one word falling from His lips will wake in the lowest depths of your soul an exclamation responsive to the magnificent language of the Psalmist,—"*Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee.*"

"From pole to pole let others roam,
And search in vain for bliss;
My soul is satisfied at home:
The LORD my Portion is.

"His person fixes all my love,
His Word removes my fear;
And while He pleads for me above
His arm preserves me here.

"His Word of promise is my food,
His Spirit is my guide:
Thus daily is my strength renewed,
And all my wants supplied."

The sight of Jesus is *veiling:* it hides other objects from the eye. Take an illustration of this from nature. Go forth and gaze for a while upon the sun in its noonday splendour. Then direct your eyes again to earth, and let them rest upon the lovely landscape, or

upon the yet lovelier forms of human beauty which pass before you. Can you see them? Has not the greater effulgence of the sun blinded you, in a measure, to all other objects? Thus is it with a spiritual sight of Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness; it veils the objects of earth, of sense, and sin from the soul. Jesus blinds us to their beauty, attraction, and power. The more we see of the Divine glory, of the human beauty, of the sacrificial worth of the Lord Jesus, the less we shall see of our own glory, of the world's attraction, and of creature excellence. Jesus veils the eye of the soul to it all. What Abraham was to Sarah, Jesus is to us. "*Behold,*" said Abimelech, "*He is to thee a* COVERING OF THE EYE *unto all that are with thee.*" The Lord Jesus is a covering of our spiritual eye to all those objects of sense which else might attract and seduce us from Him, thus eclipsing His beauty and shading His love. O let Jesus be a covering of the eye to self in all its hideous forms, to the world in all its bland attractions, to the creature in all its powerful fascination. The more we see of Him, the less we shall desire others. The higher and the brighter the sun ascends and shines, the remoter will become and the paler will grow the constellations that revolve around it. So disappear and pale all earthly objects when Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, rises upon the soul with healing in His beams. The terrestrial gives place to the celestial, self to Christ, the creature to God.

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Acts xvi. 14.
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our obscurity and numbers us among the children of God, the disciples of Jesus, the precious jewels which the Lord will own as His in the day that He makes them up. It is *conversion* alone that truly immortalizes us. The rank, the learning, the wealth, the honours of this life disappear, and the very names and memories of those who possessed them may perish; but, the *righteous* are had in everlasting remembrance, while, as we are told, "*the name of the wicked shall rot.*" Thus did divine grace attach a history and interest to the name and character of Lydia, which will fill all future time with their instruction and fragrance, and eternity with their praise. She being dead yet speaketh by her genuine conversion and holy life, to all whose hearts the same Lord, who is rich unto all that call upon Him, may, in like manner, open. Lift up your silent prayer for the teaching and blessing of the Holy Spirit while we consider the case of Lydia, as illustrating the heart spiritually closed—the heart divinely opened—and the evidences of the great and blessed change.

And, in the first place, let us view the heart as in its natural state,—spiritually *closed.* Such was Lydia's before the Lord opened it; and such, in truth, is ours. When Adam fell from the righteousness in which he was created, the whole race he represented fell in him. God was ejected from the heart as from a holy, beautiful temple, and the door was instantly closed. We

are born, therefore, with hearts shut against God,—hearts which inclose all that is morally evil, and which shut out all that is spiritually good. Born with a heart at enmity against God! Ponder that awful fact, my reader! It is the most appalling truth in the history of man. May the Holy Spirit aid and bless us while we state a few of those barriers which close the heart against Jesus; in other words,—what are some of the powerful impediments to the conversion of the soul to God.

First and foremost is *sin*. It was the fearful shock of sin which at the first closed the heart against God; and it is the unsubdued power of sin which keeps it closed. There is not in this wide universe a thing so evil, so desperately evil, as the *heart* of man. All the evil, all the crime, all the suffering which rolls its dark flood through the world has its rise in the human heart! Listen to what God says of our heart, by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah xvii. 9,—"*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*" There are many deceitful things in the world—the sea is deceitful, the wind is deceitful, Satan is deceitful, man is deceitful; but the subtlety, the deceitfulness of the unrenewed heart exceeds them all: it is "*deceitful above* ALL *things.*" And there are many wicked things in the world—wicked men, wicked works, wicked ways; but the natural heart is "DESPERATELY *wicked.*" Can language be stronger? But, if it

be possible, the testimony of Christ even exceeds this dark description. Listen to His words in Mark vii. 21—23: "*From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from* WITHIN." Appalling picture! Such is your heart and mine by nature, and such it remains until *grace* renews and sanctifies it. Is it any marvel, then, that while these sinful principles, these germs of all evil remain unsubdued, unsanctified, the heart should be closed and barred to all that is holy and good? Lord! dethrone the tyrant sin from my heart, and set up Thy kingdom of grace within my soul! Then shall "*grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life.*"

Unbelief is another barrier of the heart. We have no natural faith in Christ. Faith is a divine, supernatural principle—a plant of the heavenly paradise. We may believe historically in Jesus, and yield the assent of our judgment to the truth of His Gospel, without one grain of the "*faith of God's elect,*"—the faith that purifies the heart and saves the soul. Do not, therefore, suppose that, because you are not an atheist, denying God,—an infidel, rejecting the Bible,—a scorner, neglecting the Sabbath and the sanctuary, you are, therefore, a true believer in the Lord Jesus. Do we not read that, "*the devils believe and tremble*"?

What, then, is your faith more than theirs if it has not brought you as a lost sinner to the Saviour? if it has not divested you of your own meritoriousness, and clothed you with the righteousness of Jesus which alone justifies the soul with God? Yes, the great barrier to your conversion is *unbelief*. This, as an iron bar, closes and fastens your heart to a loving, appealing Saviour. You do not *believe* in the Lord Jesus with your heart, and without this you cannot be saved, but must perish eternally. Who can break down this iron bar of *unbelief* but God Himself?

The *absence of love to God* is a powerful barrier of the human heart. "*The carnal mind is* ENMITY *against God.*" It opens, like the morning flower, to a creature affection; it closes, like that flower at evening, to a divine. It expands gladly to receive the costly gift, but it shuts in sullen hostility to the gracious and generous Giver. And yet, what says the commandment in St. Matt. xxii. 37?—"*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*" Have you made the slightest approach towards obedience to this Divine law? Is there one spark of *love* in your heart to God?—one pulse of affection in your soul to Christ? Oh what a strong bolt of the heart to the entrance of Jesus is its natural and unmitigated enmity! its love of sin, its hatred of God; its adoration of self, and its rejection of Christ. Lord! supplant my enmity with love!

The *world*, too, has immense power in closing the heart to the converting grace of God. The world in the heart corresponds in its nature, and spirit, and power with the world without. In some one or more of its many forms—its covetousness, or its pleasures, or its honours, or its friendships, or even its false religion—the world maintains its hold and supremacy, and bars the heart to the influence and power of godliness. Oh what a mighty opposition in the unrenewed has the grace of God to overcome when it brings its divine and irresistible force to bear upon the love and power of the world enthroned upon the human heart!

Such are some of the impediments to conversion; such a few of the barriers by which the natural heart is closed against God and against His Son Jesus Christ. My reader, are they yours? The momentuous question now arises,—Can these impediments ever be removed? Can these barriers be thrown down, and the door of the heart be opened to admit and welcome the Saviour? All praise to our God, I answer, Yes! For we read of one, "*whose heart the Lord opened.*" And now, we inquire,—How did the Lord open Lydia's heart?

First, her heart was opened *to hear the Word of the Lord.* In the language of Bunyan, the "ear-gate" was first assailed. "*Faith cometh by* HEARING." There are many individuals who refuse even outwardly to listen to the message God sends to them. Like the deaf

adder, sinners stop their ears to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely, lest they should hear with their ears and be converted and be saved.

But the Lord also opened her *spiritual ear*—the ear of the soul. How strikingly was this illustrated by Jesus when He spake the word, "*Ephatha, be opened!*" and straightway the ears of the deaf man were opened. The spiritual ear is unstopped to hear the voice of Jesus. The sweetest music to which mortal ever listened now chimes upon the soul. How entrancing its tone! How ravishing its sound! It speaks of pardoning love, of saving grace; of peace with God through Christ; and of Christ's willingness and ability to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners. It is the voice of free grace, proclaiming the full forgiveness of sin and the complete justification of the soul, on the ground of God's free and unpurchased mercy,—that, "*whosoever will let him drink of the water of life freely.*" Lord! open thou the ear of my soul to hear this joyful sound, of a finished, full, and free salvation! "*Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.*"

Lydia's heart was opened by *true contrition for sin.* Impenitence, doubtless, had long rendered her heart cold and callous. She was ignorant of the deep-seated depravity that dwelt there, and knew not how great an evli was *sin* in the sight of the holy Lord God. But now the Lord had touched her heart, and lo! its icy fetters were dissolved, its rocky hardness was softened, the

fount of sensibility was unsealed, and streams of holy penitence, of godly sorrow for sin, flowed at the Saviour's feet. Is there, my reader, a spectacle that inspires an angel's joy?—is there a temple on earth in which the High and the Holy One delights to dwell?—is there a sacrifice brought to the altar of God and laid down upon that One Sacrifice Jesus has offered, more fragrant, costly, and acceptable to Him than any other that man can offer?—it is a broken and a contrite heart! Listen to the declaration of God: "*To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word.*" My reader, has your heart been so uncovered as to reveal to you its plague? Have you so seen and felt its deep depravity, its hidden corruption, its enmity to God, and its rejection of Christ, as to force from you the anxious cry,—"*God be merciful to me a sinner!*" Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. And for your encouragement let me remind you of the marvellous and most precious truth,—"*Him hath God exalted at His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.*"

The Lord opened Lydia's heart *to love.* Hitherto she had loved sin, and the world, and herself. Her affections were concentrated upon any and every false object rather than upon the right and lawful one. But now new springs of feeling were unlocked in her heart. She *loved* the Lord Jesus. Never had she truly

loved until now. Her affections—hitherto carnal, earthly, selfish—had now found a new Object, and now flowed in a new channel,—unsealing to her a fount of joy, and gladness, and bliss, which filled to its utmost capacity her whole soul. But what marvellous key had thus opened her heart? It was the love that Jesus bore her. This key can unlock the wards of your heart, my reader, and open every chamber to a new-born affection. Hitherto sin may have closed it—guilt may have hardened it—worldliness and indifference may have rendered it cold and callous; it has repelled the exhortations of the minister, the pleadings of a father, the tears of a mother, the warnings of solemn and startling judgments; but now one beam of God's love, one touch of Christ's hand, one word spoken by the Spirit, and your heart flies open, expands, and dissolves into a new-born and holy affection for that Saviour, who has so long been knocking for admittance until His locks are wet with the dew of the morning.

Let us draw a few practical and solemn conclusions from this important subject:—

1. We learn that conversion is the work of God. "*Whose heart* THE LORD *opened.*" Regeneration, or the new birth, is not of ourselves, nor of others, but of God. "*Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" Again, we are told,—"*It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh*

profiteth nothing." Thus the great transformation, through which we must pass ere we can enter heaven, is not a human, but a Divine work; not a natural, but a supernatural change. No heart voluntarily and spontaneously opens to admit the Saviour to its love. We possess no self-power to accomplish this. Try the experiment, my reader. Say to your heart,—"Submit to the supremacy of truth! Bow to the sceptre of Christ! Open to the love of God! Idols of my soul, begone. And yield the throne to Jesus!" In vain you cry: there is no response! All is locked in the profound slumber of spiritual death. As well might you repair to the picturesque cemetry, and bid the sleeping dead listen to the soft tones of the æolian breathing over their graves, as to wake your own heart to the voice of Jesus! What said Christ?—"*No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.*" What an evidence of the deep depravity of your nature, and of the power of sin, and of the utter alienation of your heart from God!—all of which fearfully enhances your responsibility while living, and will terribly augment your condemnation if finally lost. Place no reliance, then, upon pious parentage, religious education, or Christian rites; but ask the Lord to open your heart by His grace. Commune with your own heart on this vital matter, examine yourself, prove your own self by the Word of God, and ascertain whether you are quickened by the Spirit, are born of God, and have

passed from death unto life; whether, in a word, the Lord has opened your heart to attend to the things which make for your everlasting peace.

Lydia gave scriptural evidence of the reality of her conversion to God, by a public profession of her faith in, and her love to, the Lord Jesus Christ. We read that "*she was baptized.*" This was her loving act of obedience to Christ and her public union with the Church. Christ's command is, "*He that believeth and is baptized.*" And we read of the early Christians,—"*And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*" "*They that gladly received His Word were baptized.*" "*They were baptized, both men and women.*" And when Jesus was baptized of John in Jordan, He said,—speaking of Himself in mystical union with His disciples,—"*Thus it becometh* US *to fulfil all righteousness.*" Such was the command and the pattern of Christ, and such the prompt and loving obedience of His disciples. If we love Him, so let us obey His commands, imitate His example, and walk in the footsteps of the flock. Thus shall we emblecise our mystical union with Christ, both in His death and resurrection. "*Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*" [h]

[h] Rom. vi., 3, 4.

Thus publicly to *confess* Christ before the world, is but our reasonable service after the great things He has done for us. His solemn words are,—"*Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven.*" It is both our duty and privilege to "*join ourselves to the disciples,*" as did the early Christians. No true disciple of Christ would wish to go to heaven in disguise. He desires to wear the badge of Christian discipleship, to acknowledge his Lord and own his Captain. We must not be disciples of Jesus secretly,—through fear, or cowardice, or compromise. We must witness a good profession before many witnesses, be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, everywhere, and on all suitable occasions, testifying to the power of divine grace, increasing the praise of Jesus, and promoting the glory of God.

Nor are we to be alone in this solemn dedication to God. We read of Lydia that "she was baptized, *and her household.*" Her motto henceforth was, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" We are told but little of her household. It is, however, I think, clear, from the last verse of the chapter from which our text is selected, that they were *believers.* "*And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the* BRETHREN *they comforted them and departed.*" These, doubtless, were brethren in the Lord. But, whether this be so or not,

what pious parent, himself a consecrated servant of the Lord Jesus, desires and prays not that his *children* should also believe and be saved? If, for the most part, they are of tender years, they have the especial invitation of Jesus,—"*Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" Early piety, or the conversion of children is, I fear, too much overlooked by many Christians and ministers. Especially should it be the aim of the *ministry of home.* That ministry is especially designed to compass, as the object of its holy and saving influence, the domestic household, that they all may become, through grace, members of "the household of faith,"—training here for the Lord's service, and hereafter for the enjoyment of God for ever. Oh what greater happiness can thrill a Christian parent's heart than to see his children walking in the truth, their hearts early expanding to the power of the Saviour's love? We can offer them no protection, can ensure them no safeguard like early piety. Religion—heartfelt, experimental religion—is their *only* real safety. To be brought to Christ, by Him to be received, and then to grow up as plants in the courts of the Lord, enriching the world with the fruit, and filling the Church with the blossom and fragrance of their early and growing piety, oh, this is a certain and hallowed result of the believing prayers and earnest ministry of home! For this let every Christian parent send up to

heaven the prayer of faith. For this let him believingly hope and patiently wait; and though you go forth watering with tears the precious seed you sow, yet shall you return with joy, binding the golden sheaves to your grateful, praiseful bosom!

Dear little child! listening to this page with an attentive ear, with a thoughtful mind, and with a throbbing heart, you wonder if there is a message from God to *you*. You bend your ear to catch a sentence or a word in which you are personally interested. I *have* a message from God to you, dear child! It is this,—"*I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me.*" What a precious message is this! —it is a message of God's love to little children. "*I love them,*" says the Lord. And did not the Saviour, when He was on earth, exhibit this love when He invited little children to come to Him; when He rebuked the disciples for keeping them back; and when He placed a little child in their midst, and bade them imitate it, and then put His hands upon them and blest them,—thus fulfilling the beautiful prophecy concerning Himself,—"*He shall gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom.*" Dear child, come to this Saviour: you are not too young to know and love Him,—you are not too young to feel the joy of being saved, as you are not too young to die. Samuel was called of the Lord while yet young. He

was given to his mother, in answer to prayer, therefore he was called Samuel, which means, "ASKED OF GOD." In early life he was, like Jesus, found in the temple, and there the Lord called him, and he answered, —"*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" You too, my dear child, may hear the call of God, may respond to the invitation of Jesus. Oh that He may effectually call you by His Spirit now, and that your little, loving heart may exclaim,—"*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" Oh seek the Lord early: remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Say unto God,—"*My Father, be thou the Guide of my youth.*" Jesus invites you to come to the protection of His arms, to the pavilion of His heart. He asks you to flee to Him as your Saviour and to make Him your Friend. He will not despise your weak faith, your feeble love, your little knowledge. He will not refuse to save you, because though young in years you may be old in sin. His precious blood can wash you purer than the lily; yea, whiter than the snow. Go in prayer, and ask Christ to give you His holy Spirit, and beseech God to adopt you into His family and make you His child. Then O how holy and happy, useful and safe will all your future life be! As you advance in years—like the holy child, Jesus—you will "*increase in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*" And when you die, Jesus will take you to dwell with Himself for ever. Christian parents! seek this for your children,—

seek it prayerfully, seek it earnestly, seek it perseveringly, for God will be inquired of to do it.

Gracious Lord, our children see!
By Thy mercy we are free:
But shall these, alas! remain
Subjects still of Satan's reign?
Israel's young ones, when of old
Pharaoh threatened to withold;
Then Thy messenger said, "No:
Let the children also go."

When the angel of the Lord,
Drawing forth his dreadful sword,
Slew, with an avenging hand,
All the first-born of the land;
Then Thy people's doors he pass'd,
Where the bloody sign was placed:
Hear us now, upon our knees,
Plead the blood of Christ for these.

Lord, we tremble,—for we know
How the fierce, malicious foe,
Wheeling round his watchful flight,
Keeps them ever in his sight.
Spread Thy pinions, King of kings,
Hide them safe beneath Thy wings;
Lest the rav'nous bird of prey
Stoop, and bear the brood away.

THE LORD'S TIME OF LOVE.

EZEKIEL xvi. 8.

"Thy time was the time of love."

THE Prophet in this chapter employs the figure of an Israelitish woman, to illustrate the deliverance of the Jewish nation from its Egyptian bondage and its final settlement in the promised land. There is, however, something more spiritual and far more important than this. It is, doubtless, intended to shadow forth the emancipation of the soul, by Divine and sovereign grace, from the bondage of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty of the children of God—the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free—and their final and assured entrance into the heavenly kingdom —the Canaan of bliss which Jesus has gone to prepare for His saints. The time when the deliverance was effected is termed "the time of love." It was the fixed and appointed time, ordained by God, when the people of Israel were brought out of Egypt; and their time of cruel bondage, when they sighed and cried for

deliverance by reason of their cruel task-masters, is described as God's time of love toward them in their deliverance.

All this is strikingly and beautifully descriptive of the conversion of the sinner. There is a set time for the gracious calling of God's people, who are described as being "*called according to His purpose;*" and when that moment or period arrives, all God's providential arrangements are made to converge towards its accomplishment—all conspire to bring it about; and this is emphatically and spiritually termed, "*the time of love.*" God's love towards His people is, indeed, as we shall presently show, *eternal;* eternal as His being: a love before all time; nevertheless, the time of its first manifestation towards them is the time of conversion,—the time when they are brought up out of the horrible pit of unregeneracy, are plucked as brands from the burning, are quickened with spiritual life, and are graciously brought to realize their state of pardon and acceptance with God. Such is the elevating subject which is now to engage our thoughts.

I have already discoursed to you of *the heart opened* by the Holy Spirit in conversion; and then, of Jesus as the great Object which the heart, thus opened, desires earnestly *to see.* Let us now direct our thoughts to the Divine love whence these and all other blessings of grace flow. The present subject suggests two distinct parts for our consideration:—the love of God to

us in Christ Jesus, and its timely and gracious manifestation. "*Thy time was the time of love.*"

Our first and chief subject is THE LOVE OF GOD towards His people. It is the sublimest thought, the most precious theme that could possibly engage the study of angels or men. Angels have not such an interest in God's love as man, and, therefore, have no such experience of its power. God loved not unsinning angels as He loved sinful man—His elect Church fallen in Adam. In this the sovereignty and grace of His love appear in their most conspicuous and engaging light. And yet the love of God to man is the subject of their profound study. "*Which things the angels desire to look into.*"

In contemplating some of the *features* of the great love wherewith God has loved us, we naturally, in the outset, seek to trace this infinite ocean to its source. This conducts to that great perfection of God—His *eternity.* The love of God is *eternal.* Love is not so much an attribute as it is the very *essence* of God—"*God is love.*" In language the most touching God thus addresses His Church,—"*I have loved thee with an* EVERLASTING LOVE, *and therefore with loving kindness I have drawn thee.*" Eternal Love planned the scheme of our salvation; Eternal Love wrote our names in the Lamb's Book of Life; Eternal Love appointed the time and the circumstance of our conversion; and Eternal Love will keep us safely, will guide us skilfully, and will after-

wards bring us to glory. High let our voice ascend to its praise; and let our holy obedience testify the deep gratitude of our hearts for the amazing love wherewith God loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and in sins. The deepest homage we can pay this love, and the most grateful return we can make, is to accept it as the ruling principle of life. Let ours be a life of *love*—love to God and love to man. Love constraining us to filial obedience to God, to cheerful service for Christ, and to acts of self-denial for our fellow-creatures. In this we shall be followers and imitators of God as His children; for all the acts of our God—the cloud that shades, as the sunbeam that brightens our path, the discipline that embitters, as the mercy that sweeten our cup—flow from His everlasting and unchanging *love*.

It is another interesting feature of God's love that it is a divinely *revealed* affection. Fallen man could never have discovered the truth that God still loved him. He can make great discoveries in the geological structure of the earth, and in the planetary system, in science and in art; but left to his own powers, he could never have found out the great and wondrous fact that, "*God is love.*" We could never have known His will but for the record God has given us of it: the Bible alone teaches us this. Where else do we read such precious declarations as these: in the first Epistle of John iv. 9,—"*In this was manifested the love of God toward*

us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him;"—and in the Gospel by St. John iii. 16,—"*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" And, then, where should we look for that marvellous declaration of God, but in His own Word, which we find in the first Epistle of John iv. 8,—"GOD IS LOVE"? What an evidence we have here of the truth of the Bible! That Book must be divinely inspired, must be God's Book, which could reveal to us the fact that God loved us! But there is yet another revelation of this love, and another evidence of the truth of God's Word. I refer to our personal experience —the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us. Do not let any of us rest content with reading the declaration of God's great love to sinners in Christ Jesus in the letter of the Word only; but let us prayerfully and earnestly seek to have the witness within, that God is love. All other religion is "a vain religion." True religion consists in love to God influencing and sanctifying the whole life; nothing can be its substitute,—not an orthodox creed, nor an enlightened understanding, nor great gifts, nor denominational zeal, nor beautiful worship, nor costly benevolence, nor the highest religious profession, nor the warmest natural affections can take the place of *love to God.* All this is pleasant and acceptable to

God in its proper place, when it is the fruit of love to Him; but it may exist apart from love, and then it is a sacrifice in which He can take no delight.

"Love is heaven, and heaven is love;"

but it is love to God in Christ Jesus which makes it so.

We reach another feature of Divine love,—*its self-sacrifice.* The love of the Lord Jesus to us—which is essentially the love of the Father—constrained Him to make the great sacrifice of Himself for our sins. God's gift of His beloved Son, and the willing personal surrender of the Son to die the atoning death of the cross for sinners, are instances of love's sacrifice which must ever stand alone, unsurpassed and unequalled in the history of love. The grand display of God's love to us, then, was in parting with Jesus, in finding for us a Saviour so great, in sacrificing a Son so precious to save us. "*He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?*" What blessing, then, do you desire, what petition do you present, what request do you make which the love of God is not prepared to grant? Reason from the greater to the less. If God has so loved you as to give you Jesus, think you that if you desire the renewed forgiveness of your sins, or the assured evidence of your interest in His salvation, or council to guide, or strength to support, or deliverance

from any present or anticipated evil, or the supply of any pressing need, that His heart will, or possibly can, refuse you? Oh no! venture upon His love; remind Him of what it has already done; tell Him it is your warrant to approach, that it emboldens you to ask not greater but other blessings at His hand who, having given you Jesus, has promised with Jesus to give you all things.

And what self-sacrificing love is Christ's! "*Christ hath loved us and given Himself for us.*" The whole history of Christ would be an unaccountable mystery but for the explanation which His love supplies. How otherwise could we account for the mystery of His incarnation?—"*God manifest in the flesh,*"—for the mystery of His sinless obedience, for the mystery of His soul-sorrow in Gethsemane, for the mystery of His sufferings and death upon the cross, for the mystery of His triumphant resurrection from the grave and His glorious ascension up into heaven,—could we not resolve it all into the great LOVE wherewith He loved us? All this was love's sacrifice to save our souls—love sacrificing itself! In view of this amazing love of Christ, can you hesitate to come to Him just as you are, to be saved? Will you doubt His willingness or His ability to save you to the uttermost, if you but accept His gracious invitation in simple unquestioning faith? His invitation is,—"*Come unto Me;*" His promise is,—"*Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.*"

The love of God is a most *free* love. Even human love is unpurchasable: no wealth can procure its possession, as no wealth can compensate for its want. How much more unpurchasable must Divine love be! The love of God in Christ Jesus towards sinners must be spontaneous and free, since it never could be procured by man's merit: we had forfeited all holiness, and goodness, and, therefore, had "*nothing to pay.*" No declaration is more welcome, no truth more precious to the sin-awakened heart than that it is "*by* GRACE *we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.*" No words more welcome to the soul thirsting after Christ than the invitation, "*Whosoever will, let him drink of the water of life* FREELY." Is not this like Jesus? Is it not worthy of God, that when sin had rendered us bankrupt of all righteousness, when we had nothing of our own to plead but poverty and misery and unworthiness, a salvation should have been provided without our own works, irrespective of our own merit, and proclaimed to us as ours "*without money and without price*"? Come, then, thou poor sin-burdened, guilt-oppressed soul! come thou who hast spent all thy substance upon physicians of no value, and art nothing better but rather have grown worse, come and drink from the infinite fountain of the Saviour's priceless love—freely, abundantly. For, "*the* FREE GIFT *is of many offences;*" and, "*where sin hath abounded, grace doth much more abound.*" "*Eat, O friends, and drink;*

yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." "*And when they had* NOTHING TO PAY, *He frankly forgave them both.*"

But the Lord has His time of *manifesting* this love to us. The text thus expresses it,—"*Thy time was the time of love.*" Although, as we have shown, the love of God to His people is an everlasting love,—a love from all past eternity,—yet it is revealed to us at times, and often at special times, in our history. Every individual may recall to memory some period in his life of marked and solemn interest; but none so sacred and momentous to the believer as that in which he was first made to experience God's love. There are marked epochs in his history—sacred memorials in his homeward travel—lofty ebenezers studding his wilderness pathway, upon which memory will love to linger when times and seasons are lost in eternity. Let us briefly glance at some of those times in which the love of God to us is the most conspicuous.

The time of our *unregeneracy* is the time of the Lord's love. It is a remarkable expression of St. Jude's, —"*Preserved in Christ Jesus;*" that is, preserved by the love of God in Christ Jesus, through the many long years of our unrenewed condition, sin, and rebellion against God. The whole passage is remarkable for its richness and beauty. "*Them that are sanctified by God the Father,*"—that is, set apart by the purpose and love of God to be a distinct and peculiar people; "*and preserved in Christ Jesus,*"—that is, chosen in Christ, and

placed in His hands, and in Him secretly preserved from present death and from future condemnation, amid all the perils of our natural and unconverted state; "*and called*,"—that is, by the Spirit and grace of God, especially and effectually called out of darkness into light, out of self into Christ,—"*called to be saints.*" Now this was a marked time of the Lord's love—His secret and hidden love. Oh how marvellous the love of God to us, as traced through those years in which we walked according to the course of this world, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, in which we lived without God and without hope in the world. Let the thought that God loved us when we hated Him—that His thoughts of us were peace, when ours of Him were rebellion—lay our mouth in the dust before Him, and enkindle a fresh flame of affection on the altar of our hearts.

The time of the soul's *conversion* is the time of the Lord's love. How impressive His language in its spiritual application to this end! "*When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood* [margin —trodden under foot], *I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.*" When I passed by (not as by accident—nothing in God's dealings with the children of men is according to what the world terms chance)—when I passed by according to my purpose of eternal love, knowing who and what and where thou wast, "*I*

saw thee in thy blood,—not with an angered, but with a pitying eye—an eye of Divine love and infinite compassion. In thy blood—wounded, weltering, polluted, wallowing in sin,—*I said unto thee, Live.* I spake, and in a moment thy soul became quickened with new and spiritual life." Such, my reader, is real conversion. O what a golden precious time of love is this! The time when Jesus approached us in all the greatness of His love, in all the compassion of His nature, and in all the freeness of His grace, and brought us to Himself. Then it was He washed away our filthiness in His most precious blood, and we were cleansed from our sin. Then it was He threw around our naked soul the robe of His righteousness, and we were justified from all things. Then it was we burst our chains, and sprang into the liberty of Christ's free men. Then it was we passed out of present condemnation into no condemnation, and sent up a shout of joy, thanksgiving, and praise, with which the arch of heaven rang. Oh, if there is one period of our history of more thrilling interest than another, if there is one spot in the landscape of life upon which the sun of memory never sets,—it is that of our calling by sovereign grace, of our passing from death unto life, of our espousal to Jesus, of the Lord's time of revealed love to our souls, when He drew us to Himself, and said,—"*Thou art mine!*" Other spots are draped with shadows deep and shrouding; other scenes have faded one by one from memory; but our

conversion to Christ marks an epoch of our history, and forms an event of our life, the lustre of which no shadow will ever dim, and the recollection of which no hand will ever efface. O marvellous love of Jesus! —eternity shall resound with its praise!—which loved us in our sins, loved us in our rebellion, loved us in our distance from God, and drew us so gently yet so powerfully, so lovingly yet so effectually to His feet, and pronounced us His. Lord! through many changes have I passed, and many scenes have I witnessed, and many tokens of Thy goodness and faithfulness have I received since then, but Thy love to me, whose grace sought and found and brought me to Thyself, will be the evergreen of my life, and my undying joy through eternity.

"That was a time of wondrous love
When Christ, my Lord, was passing by;
He felt His tender pity move,
And brought His great salvation nigh.

"Guilty and self-condemned I stood,
Nor thought His mercy was so near;
When He my stubborn heart subdued,
And planted all His graces there.

"When, on the verge of endless pain,
He gently whispered, 'I am thine:'
I lost my fears, and dropped my chain,
And felt 'a transport all divine.'"

Often, my Christian reader, dwell upon this first act of God's love to you. The time of your public espousals to Christ and the Church,—when standing as before the altar of consecration, you openly avowed, "*I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine,*" then gave your whole being to Him,—truly was a time of love, the most solemn and memorable of your life. Oh sacred hour, when those two hearts—Christ's and yours—openly united in a covenant which death itself could not disannul, and vowed eternal love and fealty! Never, never can you forget that moment; never, never can you ignore that act. When the world would win you back, and sin would tempt you to compromise, and the love which then glowed so brightly within the breast would wax cold, then let your thoughts recall the memory of that solemn and tender scene upon which so great a cloud of witnesses fixed their eager gaze, and leave all the allurements that would tempt you from Christ, and exclaim—

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee;
Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my all shall be:
Perish every fond ambition,
All I've sought, or hoped, or known,
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and heaven are still my own."[1]

[1] Lyte.

Affliction-times, — times of trial and sorrow, — are times of love in the experience of the saints. Never has the Lord been nearer to us than then. Can we not testify from happy experience that the dark cloud was pencilled with gold,—that the bitter cup was sweetened with honey,—that the chamber of suffering, and the couch of languor, and the house of mourning have, through the visits, the sympathy, and the grace of Jesus, been to us scenes and occasions of inexpressible love? Thus is it now, and thus it ever will be.

You are, perhaps, the child of sorrow, the subject of affliction. Your faith is tempted, or your affections are tried, or your character is assailed, or your heart lies bleeding upon the green turf that covers all that once made it so happy, that lent to the world its attraction and to life its charm. Look up, O child of grief! Thy time of sorrow, thy time of temptation, thy time of bereavement is the Lord's time of *love* to you. In love "Himself hath done it;" in love He will succour and soothe you; in love He will sustain and sanctify you; and when the rod shall have blossomed, and the affliction shall have been fruitful, and the purposes of love are accomplished, then the Lord will bring you forth as gold, and you shall testify,—My time of bereaved sorrow, my time of correcting grief, was *His time of unutterable love.*

A word to two classes of my readers. Unconverted sinner! the *present* is the time of God's love in Christ Jesus. The time of the preaching of the Gospel, the time of holy Sabbaths, the time of religious opportunities is the Lord's time of love for souls. Oh that you were awakened to know the time of your visitation, and to flee to Christ while it is to-day, and to call upon God while He is near. You may be seized with unexpected illness, or may be suddenly summoned into eternity. O terrible thought! to be arrested by a disease fatal to all religious thought and feeling; to be surprised by death in a state of unpreparedness to meet God. Fly to Jesus! He waits to be gracious: escape for thy life, for "*now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.*"

Be cautious, saint of God, of attempting to *antedate* the events of your future history. The times and seasons are under the control of your heavenly Father; and when the time shall come—the time of adversity, of suffering, of death—with it will come the love that keeps you, the grace that sustains you, the sympathy that soothes you, and the power that will safely conduct you out of it all,—"tried, purified, and made white," to the glory and praise of Him that loves you. "*My times are in Thy hands;*" let this be the calm conclusion of your simple, trustful, hopeful faith,—leaving all with Jesus. Be it your only solicitude and

aim, by patient continuance in well doing, and by a meek, quiet, and submissive spirit in suffering, to glorify God in the day of visitation.

"Give to the winds thy fears,
Hope, and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears,—
God shall lift up thy head.

"Through waves, and clouds, and storms
He gently clears thy way:
Wait Thou His time—the darkest night
Shall end in brightest day."

CHRIST NOT HIDDEN.

MARK vii. 24.

"But He could not be hid."

CHRIST'S popularity was in the ascendant when the incident occured which introduces to us these remarkable words. Delighted with His wonderful and beneficent works, the people sought by force to make Him a King. But that the Scripture concerning Him might be fulfilled—*"His voice shall not be heard in the streets"* (that is, no popular commotion or excitement shall attend His steps),—He retires into the country round about Tyre and Sidon, and seeks concealment in a private dwelling: *"but He could not be hid."* A Canaanite woman who had a suffering child, with a depth and perseverance of love which only a mother knows, tracked His steps and found Him in His retreat. Our Lord, at first, though she had discovered His person, veils from her His pity and power. *"Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto Him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And*

He said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter." Such is the touching narrative which suggests and illustrates the interesting subject which is now to engage our thoughts,—viz., *the impossibility of Jesus concealing Himself from those who are set upon an earnest and persevering search for Him.* And yet there is a part of Christian experience which would seem at times to contradict this truth. There may be events in God's providence and stages of the believer's travail in which there is, for the time, the hiding of Christ, as it were, from their view. This is the dark background of our delightful picture which, with a view of enhancing its brighter aspect, it may be profitable for a moment to look at.

But before doing this, let us briefly take a more extended and solemn view of the subject, and remark that Christ is a hidden object to the *unregenerate.* The world knows not Jesus: He is a stranger in the land. In Him is the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled,—He is "*as a root out of the dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.*" Ignorance veils their understanding, sin closes their hearts, guilt darkens their conscience. And although Christ is lifted up before them in the preaching of the Gospel, until the veil is removed from their hearts they see Him not: so awfully verified in them are the words of the Apostle:—"*If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that*

are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ should shine unto them." Earnestly pray, my reader, that this appalling picture may find no resemblance in you! If still unconverted, it most assuredly and solemnly does. Christ is hidden to your spiritual eye; other objects conceal Him; self-righteousness veils Him; the world hides Him; the creature obscures Him. And thus Jesus, the only Being essential for you to know, and worthy of your sight and deserving of your love,—in whose hands your eternal destiny is lodged, who can raise you to heaven or sink to hell,—is deeply, darkly hidden from your view.

Christ, too, is hidden from the mere *religious professor.* How many there are holding the oilless lamp of Christian profession, to whom the rebuke of Christ, addressed to one of His disciples of old, will apply,—"*Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?*" Christ has been with you O nominal professor, in the ministry of the Word, in the institutions of His Church, in the examples of His saints, and in the dealings of His providence; and yet you have not spiritually, experimentally, and practically known Him. He is still, as to any vital saving knowledge, a *hidden* Christ to you. Awake up from your religion of form, get the oil of converting, quickening grace

into your heart, for the Bridegroom is speedily coming and you must go forth to meet Him. Oh terrible meeting, if it be found that until that solemn moment Jesus had been, through all the long years of your religious profession, but a hidden Saviour!

In the ministry of how many who *profess to preach Him* is Christ hidden! I utter the sentiment not in a uncharitable spirit—more in pity than in anger—when I assert that that all who preach religious duties in the place of faith,—all who overlay Christ with the flowers of human philosophy and learning,—all who pluck the crown of Deity from His brow, and who either preach His Atonement with reserve, or keep it back altogether,—all who heed the popular cry, "*Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits,*"[1] — all who thus, in their ministry, veil the Lord Jesus Christ from the longing eye of His saints, forcing from them the bitter lamentation,—"*They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him,*"—must rank with those who preach a hidden Christ, entombing Him as in a sepulchre, and rolling a great stone at its mouth. For all such preachers of a "*false Christ,*" let your earnest prayer ascend to God, that the Saviour may be discovered to them. And let your fervent prayer also ascend for those who faithfully aim to preach Christ crucified,—that they, by His gift of grace, may exalt

[1] Isaiah xxx. 10.

Him higher and yet higher. O, that there were less criticising of the ministry and more prayer for the minister! then would our profiting appear unto many.

But we reach now our main subject—an interesting page of Christian experience. The saints of God often have to complain of the visible withdrawal of the Lord's presence. The language of God addressed to His Church in the prophecy of Isaiah seems to intimate this,—"*For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the* LORD *thy Redeemer.*"[k] Such, too, was the complaint of the Church of old,—"*By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not. I opened to my Beloved; but my Beloved had withdrawn Himself, and was gone: my soul failed when He spake: I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He made me no answer.*"[l] Such a dreary path in the Christian pilgrimage he is often called to tread. Jesus is for a while hidden to the longing eye. Like the holy women at the tomb, they seek Him, but He is not there. Like the sad and pensive disciples journeying to Emmaus, their eyes are holden, and He is veiled from their sight. He is, as it were, a hidden Christ. Is this your present experience, my Christian

[k] **Isaiah liv. 7, 8.** [l] **Solomon's Song iii. 1; v. 7.**

reader? Be not cast down. All the saints, more or less, have left their footprints along this path. Even Jesus Himself has trodden it. One of the darkest and most terrible pages of His history was His desertion upon the cross,—was the hiding from Him of His Father. Listen to the cry,—"*My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken Me?*" O how completely was Christ one with His people in all the stages of their homeward travel! And this may be the path you are now treading—dreary and lonesome. Jesus is to you as a hidden Saviour. Sin may have forced His momentary withdrawal, unbelief may veil Him from your vision, or deep sorrow dim your eye. But be of good cheer! His hiding is but for a moment. He will return again, and restore to you the joys of His salvation, and you shall once more walk in the light of the Lord.

This conducts us to our second thought,—the impossibility that Christ should be really hid. "*But He could not be hid.*" In what respects is this true?

His *essential glory* cannot be hid. Veiled, indeed, was His Godhead in flesh: yet even this was but partial. There were occasions in His history when through the veil of His humanity the rays of His deity burst forth with convincing and overpowering effulgence. For example: on the occasion of His first visit in Cana of Galilee, it is recorded that, "*He manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*" Again: on the occasion of His Transfiguration His

Divine glory shone round about Him, and His disciples were "*eyewitnesses of His majesty.*" Thus His Divine dignity, glory, and power *cannot* be hid. Men may deny His Godhead and reject His Atonement, but as well may they attempt to blot the sun from its sphere or to stop the progress of the earth round its centre, as to hide the glory of His Deity, or impede the advancing conquests of His death. The orb of His majesty has arisen, and His enemies cannot extinguish it; the tide of His truth has set in, and error cannot arrest it; His kingdom is established in the world, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. My reader, if you are on the side of Christ and His truth, you are on the strong and the victorious side. There is no neutrality here. We are either for Christ, or we are against Christ. "*He that is not with Me is against Me,*" said the Lord. See that you are with Christ; your heart with Him, your talents, your influence, your time and your worldly substance—all, *all* for Jesus. Valiant for His truth on the earth, vindicating the honour of His name, and devoted to the advancement of His kingdom in the world, and, above all, living the holiness of His Gospel, you follow the standard of Him who will lead you from conquest to conquest, and finally to glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life! Oh, is not this worth the struggle with sin, the mortification of the flesh, a crucifixion to the world, and a life of self-denying consecration to Jesus?

The *love of Christ* cannot be hid; His whole life was a life of love. Every word He spake was the echo of love; every act He performed was the deed of love; every tear He shed was the sensibility of love; every pang He endured was the suffering of love. O how Jesus loved! It was impossible that His love, which blazed out more brightly than the noonday sun, could be concealed: His love is as visible to us now. Satan seeks to conceal it by his suggestions, unbelief would rob you of it by its doubts, sin would wrest it from you by its guilt, even sorrow would enshroud it in some dark cloud; nevertheless, the love of Christ is too divine and too human, too great and too free to be a concealed and unknown thing. Behold it, my reader! It unveils its bosom to *you;* it opens its door to you; it holds out its hand to you; it invites you to approach in the deep consciousness of your sin and misery, your emptiness and poverty, and accept in faith the costliest gift it can bestow, the greatest blessing it can confer, —even the present entire pardon of your sins and a full, free justification of your person. Thus will the all-powerful love of Christ burst through every barrier of unbelief, lay low every mountain of sin, penetrate every shade of sorrow, and stand before the believing soul, a love unparalleled and unrivalled, which no cloud-veil can conceal, and which many waters cannot quench.

The *willingness and ability of Christ to save sinners* cannot be hid. The world is filled with too many

witnesses for this. Every truly converted sinner, every loving gracious soul is a lasting monument of the salvation of Jesus,—a living witness to His power and His grace in saving to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. With so great a cloud of witnesses, then, to Christ's reception of poor lost sinners, need you, my reader, despair of being saved? What! will you be the one solitary exception? Will you be the first to perish at His feet—to die suing out your pardon beneath His cross,—sent empty and unblest away from the door of His mercy, at which you have so long anxiously and beseechingly knocked? Oh no! never! Arise, and go into the royal presence of the King of grace, exclaiming—

"Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish I will pray,
And perish only there.

"And if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die—delightful thought!—
As sinner never died."

And who are they who really find Jesus? First, *the sin-burdened* find Him. To whom else can they go? To whom more fitly?—to whom more immediately? Jesus is the Sin-bearer of His Church. God the Father laid upon Him the transgressions of His people, and for them He made His soul an offering for sin. And when

the Holy Spirit convinces the soul of its sin and guilt and condemnation, under the guiding of the same Spirit it sets itself upon the work of seeking Christ; and, seeking Him earnestly and perseveringly, it *finds* Him,—for, He cannot be hid. Press on in your inquiry and search, O sin-troubled soul, through all difficulty and opposition and discouragement,—for you *shall* find Him. It is impossible that He can hide Himself from you. His invitations and His promises assure you of this,—"*Seek, and ye shall find.*"

The *soul-distressed and perplexed believer* finds Him. The Lord permits soul-trouble that we may be set upon seeking Him. You are anxious about an assured interest in Christ; you are filled with fear and alarm lest this new discovery you have made of indwelling sin should prove from past experience a deception, and your present hope a lie. You are perhaps troubled with vain, sinful, blasphemous thoughts, and you know not how to reconcile their existence and assault with the divine nature in your soul and the love of God in your heart. But this experience have all the saints; all have trodden this path to glory. No saint has arrived there without a fearful struggle with sin; no believer has reached the realms of bliss without many a shaft from the adversary, and with the scar of many a wound, which shall go with him to glory to testify to the zeal, faithfulness, and love with which he fought the battles of his Lord. All such shall find

Jesus a merciful and faithful High Priest, succouring them that are assailed, delivering the godly out of temptation, and quieting the fears of His saints with the assured truth that the spiritual warfare they discover within is the result of two opposite principles—sin and grace; of two diverse natures—that of the first and that of the Second Adam.

The *tried and afflicted* find Jesus. Whither can we repair with our sorrows but to Him? They are sent for this end. We have, perhaps, been insensible to Christ's attractions, and have not yielded to His drawings; and now He has sent the rod that *drives* us to Him. Oh how often does He visit us with trouble, that it may stir us up to seek Him. It is recorded of Manasseh that, "*when he was in affliction, he sought unto the Lord his God.*" Blessed discipline that sets us upon the search for Christ! He has, perhaps, for some time been to us as a hidden Christ. We have followed Him, like Peter, afar off. Our love to Him has chilled; our zeal for Him has waned; our desires for Him have lessened; our heart has gone after other loves. But, bent upon our restoration, He sends pining sickness, or crushing adversity, or heart-breaking bereavement,—the rod of correction in one or more of its many forms; and then we discover the real state of our souls,—at what a distance we have been walking from God, how little of our hearts Jesus possessed; and, like the Church of old, we arise and

go about the streets, and inquire, "*Have ye seen Him whom my soul loveth?*" Blessed discipline, we again exclaim, that results in setting us upon the errand of searching out and finding Christ. To whose love so tender, to whose sympathy so compassionate, to whose succour so effectual, and to whose power so mighty can we disclose our sorrow as Christ's? There is not a being in the universe who so loves and cares for you as Jesus, and into whose precious presence we have such immediate access as His.

The poor penitent, returning *backslider* finds Christ. And who more needs to search and find and experience His restoring grace than one who has felt the love of God, has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and who has fed in the green pastures where Jesus leads His flock and causes them to lie down; but who, yielding to the devices of his own heart, the allurements of the world, and the temptations of Satan, has departed from the Lord into bye and forbidden paths of sin and folly, walking no more with Jesus. Has the Holy Spirit enkindled in your heart godly grief, holy, tender contrition? Are you God's repentant Ephraim, bemoaning yourself, ashamed and confounded, exclaiming, "*Turn Thou unto me, and I shall be turned*"? Are you like Christ's Apostle, Peter, "weeping bitterly" at the sad remembrance of your backsliding? O betake yourself to Christ, who, though He may long have been to you as a hidden Saviour, will yet be found of you again,

receiving you graciously, loving you freely, and turning His anger away from you. O the joy of Christ's heart over one stray sheep returned to the fold! Wandering child of God! backsliding believer, return! This is His own invitation. "*Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.*"

"Return, O wanderer! Return,
And seek an injured Father's face;
Those warm desires that in thee burn
Were kindled by restoring grace."

In conclusion, let us not forget that we had never found Jesus, had He not first sought and found us. If you have taken one step towards God, it is because He has taken ten thousand steps towards you. His language is,—"*I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not.*" He first began the work of grace in your soul, inspired the first desire, created the first throb of life, and kindled the first spark of love. O give Him the praise due to His great and Holy name; and ever acknowledge by your holy walk, your loving return of obedience, of service, and of patient endurance of suffering, your eternal indebtedness to the grace that sought you out in the cloudy and dark day, and brought you to Jesus.

Be watchful against everything that would hide Christ from your view. The *world* is a very Christ-

obscuring object — guard against its encroachment; you cannot, in your march to heaven, take Christ in one hand and the world in the other. You and the world must part, however self-denying the struggle, if you would walk with God. *Sin* is a Christ-obscuring object: pray against its power. Nothing is so Christ-veiling as tampering with sin, as a wilful dallying with unholy temptation, as guilt upon the conscience, unconfessed, uncleansed, unforsaken. Distance in our devout walk, the restraining of prayer, the unfrequent visits to the place of sweet fellowship with God, will obscure the Saviour from our view. Some disciples follow Christ *so far off* that they can scarcely distinguish His form from that of a stranger!

Another word of caution. Enter not into places, or society, or recreation, as a Christian, where Christ is excluded. "*Surely the fear of God is not in this place,*"[m] exclaimed Abraham of Abimelech's house. If this is your experience, flee from the place as unsuited to one who desires to rule his life and his home by the fear of God. You will not find Christ's approving, sanctifying presence in scenes of worldly gaiety, in haunts of carnal pleasure, or amid the excitement of political, social, or ecclesiastical strife. You will not find Him at the card-table, nor at the theatre, nor in the dance, nor on the turf. You will not find Him where error is preached, or false worship is offered, or

[m] Gen. xx. 11.

religious formalism maintains its cold and lifeless reign. Oh no! not here, *not here*, beloved, will you find the Lord. In all these places, and amid all these scenes Christ is hid! But you will find Him in the midst of His saints, met together in His Name. You will find Him among the poor in spirit, the broken of heart, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, —to whom His name is as ointment poured forth, and who, in their emptiness and poverty, live upon His fulness. You will find Him in the home of mourning, amid the scene of adversity, in the chamber of sickness, by the couch of suffering, at the bed of death, and at the grave that unveils its bosom to receive the ransomed dust of a temple of the Holy Ghost. Most of all, you will find Him in the retirement and solitude of the closet, shut in alone with God, in sweet "*fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Christ Jesus.*" Heed not the *popular* cry, "Lo! here is Christ!" Believe it not, and go not after it, for He is not there. Our Lord has forewarned us of this as one of the signs of the last day. Even now are there many "false Christs." But inquire after and walk in the old paths, shaded with His cross, traced with His feet, and trodden by His saints.

Look forward to the great day of His personal, visible, and illustrious manifestation. "*Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the eavth shall*

wait because of Him."[n] Then, when the dead in Christ shall have been raised, and the living saints shall have been translated, and the millennial reign shall have terminated, Christ will sit upon the great white throne, and before Him all nations shall be gathered. And then shall every eye be rivetted upon His glorious and ineffable countenance, each gazer waiting to hear from His lips, with joy or sorrow, with hope or fear, the blessed word, "COME!" or the terrible word, "DEPART!"

"But, ere the trumpet wake
The mansions of the dead,
Hark! from the Gospel's gentle voice
What joyful tidings spread!

"Ye sinners, seek His grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of His cross,
And seek salvation there.

[n] Rev. i. 7.

THE WOMAN THAT LEFT HER WATERPOT.

JOHN iv. 28, 29.

"The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

IT was a striking and instructive feature in the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus, that the most gracious and unreserved discoveries of His Messiahship were to the most unworthy and improbable objects. His saving and sovereign grace delighted to illustrate its wealth by conferring it upon the poorest, and its power by saving the most vile. It was *deep* in the mine of fallen nature He loved to sink the shaft of His Gospel, in quest of the lost and hidden jewels He had come from heaven to seek and to save. This fact introduces us to that large class of the community to whom, for the most part, our blessed Lord limited His ministry. They were the poor and unlearned, the depraved and despised of the race. Far different from these might have been His listeners. Had He chosen He might have identified Himself with the most celebrated scholars of Greece and Rome, placing Himself at their

head, attracting and chaining them to His feet as His adoring disciples. He could have composed a poem, or have painted a picture, or have propounded a philosophy that would have filled all Athens with the splendour of His genius, and the world with the echoes of His fame. But this was neither His mission nor His sphere. He left these pagan sages to prove to the world that by its wisdom it knew not God; and suffered them to learn the utter inefficacy of art, science, and philosophy, either to emancipate their own selves from the grovelling superstitions by which they were enthralled, or to elevate the masses from the moral degradation into which they were sunk. The people asked for bread, and these heathen philosophers gave them a stone; they looked for a fish, and received a serpent. Thus true is the Bible,—"*Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.*" But let the evangelical Prophet Isaiah describe the nature of the ministry, and the character of Christ's hearers: "*The Spirit of the* LORD *God is upon us, because the* LORD *hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.*"

The incident selected for our present exposition is a true and impressive illustration of these remarkable

words. It refers to the conversion of the woman of Samaria. Our Lord had travelled forty miles on that day, and at the sixth hour (or, at about twelve o'clock, the time of the Jewish meal) weary and footsore He sat Him upon (or, probably, hard by) Jacob's well. "*There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water.*" Then follows the remarkable, soul converting conversation of Christ with this woman, and the happy result, as narrated in the words I am about to unfold: "*The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?*"—or, the Messiah. Guided by the leading points of this interesting and instructive narrative, three things suggest themselves for our study:—Christ's knowledge of the woman of Samaria, —the woman's discovery of Christ,—and her spiritual change consequent upon that discovery.

The knowledge which the Lord Jesus possessed of this woman was marvellous and minute. They had never met before, and, perhaps, never met on earth again, and yet He knew all about her—her name, her abode, her past history, and the sad, *sad* life of sin she then was living. What a great and precious truth does this unfold with regard to Jesus—His especial knowledge of His people. "*I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep: my sheep hear My voice, and I know them.*" Jesus knows them before conversion, when in their natural

state of sin and rebellion. Hidden though they are in the quarry of their unregeneracy, mixed with the world, lost in the crowd, He has His eye of mercy upon them, for He knew them from eternity. When the Father placed the lost jewels in His hand to seek and to save, each one passed before His eye; He knew them when, with His own hand, He wrote their names in His eternal Book of Life; He knew them when He hung upon the cross, paying out His soul unto death —a ransom to God for their redemption.

Not less minute is Christ's knowledge of His people *after conversion.* If He knew them from eternity,—if, when involved in the wreck and ruin of our fallen nature, He knew them,—if, in their rebellion and folly (lost, perhaps, in many instances, to virtue, honour, and happiness) He knew where to find them,—surely there is nothing belonging to them, since His sovereign grace has sought and found them, which He does not know—and with the minute knowledge of His own divine love. Believer in Jesus! the Lord knows you altogether: deem not yourself as hidden in the crowd. While His knowledge of His flock is universal, it is also personal and special. He knows them collectively, and He knows them individually. You may feel yourself almost overlooked; those who are acquainted with you do not know you, and those who do know you may not understand you. But, be still every thought! hushed be every murmur! Jesus knows you person-

ally, knows you minutely, knows you altogether. He knows your name, for He wears it upon His breastplate; He knows your burden, for He carries it upon His shoulder; He knows your sorrow, for He enshrines it in His heart; He knows all the way that you take, for all that way He has Himself ordained. Such knowledge as this, how unutterably precious to the believing soul! How closely and firmly does the faith of the Christ-loving heart enfold around itself the *omniscience* of Jesus! "*O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall guide me.*"

We approach now a remarkable and instructive part of the narrative—*Christ's discovery of Himself to the woman.* In the course of a lengthened conversation the question of Christ's Messiahship was raised. "*The woman saith unto Him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when He cometh He will tell us all things.*" The blessed Saviour could not resist this pointed and touching reference to Himself. The hidden spring of His love was touched by the hand of a poor sinner, in quest of whom He had travelled that day many weary miles—and that touch, unconscious to

herself, was irresistible with Him. No longer able to preserve His disguise, and, as if aware of discovery, He removed the veil, and stood before her—the long-promised, the true, the acknowledged Messiah: "JESUS SAITH UNTO HER, I THAT SPEAK UNTO THEE AM HE." What a precious prophecy concerning Christ was now fulfilled! "*My people shall know My name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am He that doth speak: behold, it is I.*"[a] What an honour did Jesus confer upon this woman! That He should make Himself known in such explicit terms, in so gracious a manner, and to so obscure an individual and so great a sinner, while from all others the fact of His Messiahship had been withheld, save to His Apostles—and only revealed to them under the seal of silence—surely was a marvellous and precious instance of His great and free grace to poor sinners. What an announcement,—"*I that speak unto thee am He!*" The discovery of a new world were as nothing to this! The Saviour promised, ere the gates of paradise closed upon our sinning and expelled parents; of whom Moses wrote, and Isaiah sung, and whose day Abraham saw; the Redeemer whom types foreshadowed, and symbols taught, and prophets predicted; the Beloved Son and the unspeakable gift of God, now stood before this guilt-stained woman; the revealed, the confessed, the gracious Saviour of men! O what marvellous, what sovereign grace!

[a] Isaiah lii. 6.

Here let me pause, and ask you, my reader,—Has there been a discovery of the Saviour, through faith and by the Spirit, to *your* soul? Has this same Jesus been made known to *you?* I inquire, not if you have found Him, but,—has He found you? Oh! it is of infinite moment to you to be assured of this. The religion of many is a religion destitute of *a manifestation of Jesus to their souls.* It is a cold, lifeless profession of Christianity without Christ, — a form of godliness without the power. It is for your life I press the inquiry,—Has Christ *revealed* Himself to your soul? This is the essence, the very soul of vital, experimental, saving religion. Real religion is to know Christ, to have a revelation of Christ,—yea, it is Christ Himself in us. And there can be no true comfort, no assured hope until faith has apprehended or laid hold of Christ, and Christ has removed the veil from our heart and the disguise from Himself, and has spoken these precious words,—"I THAT SPEAK UNTO THEE AM HE."

And the Lord Jesus is prepared to make Himself known to poor anxious souls. What the woman of Samaria, in her deep sinfulness, found, *you* may find. Limit not His redeeming mercy, restrict not His free grace, doubt not His pardoning love, but bend your ear to His gracious voice.—"I that *speak* unto thee am He who came into the world to save sinners. I am He upon whom my Father laid the burden and

the curse of your sins. I was wounded for your transgressions, and was bruised for your iniquities. I obeyed the law, and my obedience is your righteousness; I suffered and bled, and my death is your atonement. I am He who bindeth up the broken in heart and healeth their wounds. I am He whose blood cleanseth from all sin, who pardons the guiltiest, accepts the poorest, saves the vilest. I require no merit, expect no worthiness, ask no price; but receive, pardon, and save you *just as you are.* It is My office, My delight, My glory to seek and to save lost sinners. I am the good Shepherd; I know My sheep and the work of My Spirit in their hearts, and the desire of their souls towards Me. I am He that speaketh unto you by My Spirit, in My Word and through My ministers; by all the temptations that prove you, and by all the sorrows that shade you, and by all the blessings that gladden you, and by all the hopes that cheer you. Let no voice but mine speak peace to your soul. Let no other pronounce you forgiven, or assure you that you are saved. Let your prayer to me be,—'*Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.*' Let Me speak, and all shall be peace!" Such, virtually, are the precious words of Jesus to every spiritually awakened sinner.

We now reach the transforming effect of this manifestation of Christ upon the character and conduct of this woman. Our text informs us,—"*The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith*

to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" She left her waterpot. What means this sudden and marvellous change? Why this forgetfulness of her errand to the well? What had she found as a substitute? Why this hasty and eager abandonment of her worldly goods? Oh, she had now, by the Saviour's converting grace, become "a new creature," A new spiritual world had burst upon her view. She had found Him of whom Moses and the prophets spoke—Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, the Saviour of sinners. She had found the Fountain of living water; she drank of it, and her soul lived. Until now she loved sin, lived in sin, and, but for Jesus, she had perished in sin. The object of His everlasting love, she now became the subject of His converting grace. The living water which Jesus gave her was now a well of water in her soul,—a springing-well of life, grace, and love in her heart; and, with this new-found treasure and this new-born joy, she forgot her errand to the well, and retraced her steps back to the city, to tell her friends and neighbours what great things the Lord had done for her soul! Such, my reader, is *true* conversion! The Holy Spirit imparts a new and a divine nature; divine grace supplants the principle of sin with the principle of holiness,—changes the thirst for the world into a thirst for Christ. The pottery of earth is exchanged for the golden vessel of heaven, now filled to overflowing with the new-born

love and joy of Christ the Lord. "*Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst.*"

"I thirst: but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share;
Thy wounds, Immanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasures there.

"It was the sight of Thy dear cross,
First weaned my soul from earthly things;
And taught me to esteem as dross
The mirth of fools and pomp of kings.

"I want the grace that springs from Thee,
That quickens all things where it flows,
And makes a wretched thorn like me
Bloom as the myrtle or the rose.

"Dear Fountain of delight unknown!
No longer sink beneath the brim;
But overflow, and pour me down
A living and life-giving stream!"

Precious and important are the *instructions* we may gather from the whole narrative. We learn, in the first place, that our Lord's initiative step in the conversion of this sinful woman, was *to make her spiritually acquainted with her own self.* She was living in known and deadly sin. Jesus, who knew all that she was, said unto her,—"*Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband.*" Thus did the Lord turn her eye in upon herself. Whence the knowledge of her sin? How did He know her

life and read her heart? Because He was GOD as well as Man—the God-Man, Christ Jesus. What a proof of the divinity of our blessed Lord is this! Thus we learn, in conversion, that before the Lord makes Himself known to us He first makes us known to ourselves. A personal acquaintance with our sinfulness is essential to a personal acquaintance with Jesus as our Saviour. Have you been so enlightened, my reader? Have you approached God in the spirit, attitude and prayer of the humble and penitent publican, and cried, "*God be merciful to me a sinner*"? O this is the first step in your conversion! Lord! show me to myself, that I may know Thee!

We learn from the history of this woman the coexistence of *formalism* and *sin* in the same individual. How close may be a religious form and an irreligious life! The woman of Samaria was a zealous Ritualist; she could argue intelligently and contend warmly for *her* place and mode of religious worship. "*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*" How deceitful and desperately wicked is the human heart! Thus may an individual maintain with tenacity, and contend with fiery zeal for a form of godliness which is utterly destitute of its vital, sanctifying reality; for a party, a denomination, a church; and all the while be the vassal of Satan, the servant of sin, and the slave of concupiscence. But nothing can be

a substitute for the *new birth;* no religious service, nor creed, nor zeal, nor profession, nor worship, nor sacraments, can be a substitute for the conversion of the heart. We *must* be BORN AGAIN, or eternally perish! Oh, let us examine our hearts, each for himself, touching this vital and momentous matter!

The Lord Jesus likewise teaches us in this narrative *the nature of true and acceptable worship.* He emphatically declares it to be *spiritual.* "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*" No other worship is acceptable with Him. However splendid the building, or beautiful the ritual, or imposing the ceremonial, it is nothing with God. The sweetness of the music, the grandeur of the service, the solemnity of the demeanour, without the devotion of the heart are an abomination in His sight. Let us seek much of the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit, that we may worship our heavenly Father in spirit and in truth; for He seeks such, and only such, to worship Him. He looketh to the heart—"*to the man who is of an humble and contrite spirit.*" Oh how costly and precious in His view is the incense of a heart lying lowly and broken at His feet!—no sacrifice upon His altar is like this to Him. Thus our Christian HOMES may be true sanctuaries of God; the worship offered to Him *there* pure and spiritual, and its ministry—expounding and enforcing His sacred Word—a holy and divinely-authorized agency for making

known Christ, *blessed* and made *a blessing*, encircling the whole household with the fragrance of His precious name.

We are told, in the commencement of this spiritually instructive narrative, that Jesus "must NEEDS go through Samaria." Why this constrained necessity? Has it not a spiritual significance most precious? The whole incident supplies the answer. There was a poor adulterous woman living in that city, needing His grace, and for whom He had covenant purposes of mercy, and eternal thoughts of love, and He must needs—as in the case of Zaccheus—"pass that way" to search and find her, and draw her to Himself. We learn a most precious truth from this, my beloved reader. There is a holy *needs be* in all that Christ does. There was a *needs be* in the *providence* which brought you into grace; and there has been a *needs be* in all His gracious dealings with you since then,—a *needs be* in every permitted assault of Satan, and in every discovery of inbred corruption, and in every season of spiritual darkness. There is a *needs be* in all the way by which God is at present leading you, in all the dispensations of His love, in every cloud that shades, in every element that embitters, in every stroke that wounds. God dealeth not with His people as a despot, tyrannically and arbitrarily,—but as a Father, lovingly and wisely. O yes! there is a wise, righteous, loving *needs be* in all that He does with us. He would not thus

have shaded your life's bright landscape, nor have embittered your sweet domestic joy, nor have thus sorely tried your faith and patience, had there not have been a holy *needs be;*—some inbred corruption to subdue, some threatening evil to check, some unseen ill to prevent, some untold blessing to bestow. Yield yourself up unto God; and, "*though now for a season, if* NEEDS BE, *ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations,*" yet, "*the trial of your faith, though tried with fire,*" will most surely result in your greatest good and in the Lord's highest glory.

Have you left the waterpot? or, to speak less figuratively, Have you abandoned your idols for the Lord Jesus?—and, finding Him, have you turned your back entirely upon things that are seen and temporal, Caleb-like, "WHOLLY *following the Lord?*" O to be true followers of Christ! following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth—wholly, unreservedly following Him; renouncing a sinful, Christ-rejecting, God-hating world—its carnal enjoyments, its worldly gaieties, its human confidences, its unhallowed friendships and connections—following hard after that blessed Saviour whom the *ungodly* world condemned, whom the *religious* world covered with shame, and whom the *infidel* world nailed to the tree! Such is the world *now!*—and as such we must come out of it, and separate ourselves from it, and touch not the unclean thing. We must leave all, if need be, for Christ; we shall find all we have left, and

infinitely more, in Him. "*Lo, we have left all and followed Thee. And Jesus answered, and said, Verily, I say unto thee, There is no man that hath left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*" And now the "waterpot" is left! The world has lost its charm, the creature its attraction, carnal sweets their power to please, earth is exchanged for heaven, and henceforth CHRIST is all in all through time and through eternity!

Let us imitate the zeal of this new convert, and seek to bring others to Christ. "*Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did.*" One of the first publishers of the glad tidings of the Gospel would seem to have been a *woman*, just rescued from sin and made a monument of grace. The Lord would teach us by this fact that, while the office of the Christian ministry, as a divine institution, stands alone, all private Christians not excepting the female sex, may, like the woman of Samaria, invite sinners to Jesus. While it is the work of the Holy Spirit alone to convert, it is our duty instrumentally to say,—"Come, and see Jesus." Oh! let none of us aspire after a "starless crown." May the diadem which Christ will place upon the brow of every disciple faithful unto death, be gemmed with many a

precious soul, led to Jesus by our hands. Then, with the Elders we will lay down that jewelled diadem at Jesu's feet, and He shall have all the glory, and to Him shall be all the praise!

> "Now will I tell to sinners round,
> What a dear Saviour I have found:
> I'll point to Thy redeeming blood
> And say,—"Behold, the way to God!"

One word: "The well is deep!" God's love, Christ's grace is an infinite depth,—deeper than our sins, deeper than our unworthiness, deeper than our need. Come in child-like faith, and just as you are, to Christ; and with joy shall you draw water out of this deep, this fathomless, this free well of salvation. "*Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*" The Lord add His blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE.

PROVERBS xviii. 21.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

IT is a painful and humiliating thought, that a faculty so noble as speech, a gift so useful as language, should ever be so ignobly employed and basely misused as it often is. God has not endowed us with a faculty or furnished us with an engine more fruitful of good or of evil than this. Of the power of the tongue for *evil*, how strong is the language of the Apostle James, —*"The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."* These are words terribly significant! Not less strong is the language of God's Word, touching the power of the tongue for *good*:—*"The tongue of the just is as chosen silver." "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life." "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad." "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that*

is weary." Thus, what a marvellous instrument of power is human language! As the vehicle of thought, as the channel of love, and as the instrument of intercourse it transcends all others. The tongue of the intelligent instructs us; the tongue of the holy sanctifies us; the tongue of the sympathizing soothes us; the tongue of the faithful admonishes us; the tongue of the loving and the kind is as marrow to the bones; and, transcending all, the tongue that discourses to us of JESUS is as *life* to the soul. Marvellous instrument! possessing a power so great. Capable of producing such great misery or such intense happiness; of being a curse so bitter or a blessing so sweet. "*Out of the same mouth,*" is the language of St. James, "*proceedeth blessing and cursing.*"

Before proceeding further with our meditation, let me endeavour to impress you with a solemn conviction of its great practical importance. It is not an idle or speculative subject which now asks your consideration. It is more closely connected with our individual sanctification and with the solemn transaction of the final judgment than, perhaps, many of my readers may have thought. If, as the Apostle James says, "*the tongue is a world of iniquity,*" and if, as the Lord Jesus has forewarned us,—"*By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned,*"—then, it takes its place by the side of the most vital and serious subjects that can engage our study. I speak the words of

truth and soberness when I remark, that most of the evils which shade the lustre of domestic happiness, empoison the springs of social intercourse, sending their baneful influence along all the channels of society —and most of the strifes and dissensions which mar the harmony and impair the holiness of Christians, may be traced to unguardedness of speech,—to an unbridled, unhallowed use of the tongue. Since speech, as I have remarked, is one of those noble faculties by which man is distinguished from the irrational creation, the thought should never be absent from our minds that, on its proper or perverted use hangs much of the good or much of the evil that affects human society. As heirs of eternity, nothing that we utter can be deemed trifling or insignificant. If our *thoughts* are indestructible, equally so are the *words* which clothe them. The air itself is a vast whispering-gallery, along which travel, as upon its undulating waves, the thoughts we conceive and the words we utter, onward to the distant shores of the eternity to which they speed; where, though *now* scarcely noted or soon forgotten, they will meet us again,—rising up as witnesses against us at the great day of judgment, if not cleansed and sanctified by the blood of the Lamb. Such is the solemn subject which is about to engage our study. May the Holy Spirit guide and sanctify our present meditations! May the tongue which is about to speak be touched as with living fire!

In the first place, we are told that, "*death is in the power of the tongue.*" This—taking a general and comprehensive view of the subject—will apply to *all* species of *evil speaking.* The evil tongue is a polyglot; that is, it speaks as in many languages: its name is *legion.* Let me specify a few of those particular forms which come under the general head of *evil speaking.*

First: there is the tongue of the *talebearer*—the officious propagator of idle gossip: a numerous body, alas! is this—greater pests to society do not exist within its bosom. What lengths will not the talebearer travel, what pains will he not take, what time will he not expend in circulating an injurious report, in giving currency to a dark surmise! It was, perhaps, at first but a conjecture, a rumour, a hearsay; nevertheless, this voracious devourer of evil, this ruthless utterer of base coin, has caught it,—and it now becomes his self-imposed and dreary mission to travel from one end of the town to the other, in one day giving circulation and fixedness to a slander, the sad effects of which years may not entirely obliterate. I ask, is there not *death* in the power of the tongue of an idle, unscrupulous talebearer? But what does the Word of God say concerning such? There is, first, God's positive command, *forbidding* the crime,—"*Thou shalt not go up and down as a* TALEBEARER *among the people.*" What observeth Solomon? "*A* TALEBEARER *revealeth secrets.*" "*The words of a* TALEBEARER [margin, *whisperer*] *are as*

wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." "*Where no wood is, the fire goeth out; so, where there is no* TALEBEARER [whisperer], *the strife ceaseth.*" "*He that uttereth a* SLANDER *is a fool.*" And what says the holy and indignant Psalmist? "*Whoso privily* SLANDERETH *his neighbour, him will I cut off.*" Such is the solemn light in which the Scriptures of truth place *this* form of evil speaking. There is *death* in it—death to domestic happiness and individual reputation. Shun the talebearer as you would the touch of a glove infected with the plague; set your face as a flint against him; let him see by your look that his presence is as distasteful as his mission is abhorrent. "*The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a* BACKBITING *tongue.*" Thou, idle gossiper! travelling from house to house, retailing thine unholy wares, trafficking in character, reputation, and happiness; thou violator of confidence! unveiling domestic life, within whose sacred precincts unguarded friendship admitted you; thou keen anatomist! visiting abodes for no other purpose than to dissect the character, or the doings, or the sayings of each family or neighbour—while *your own* dreads most of all the knife and the probe—what are you but a moral epidemic, that walketh in darkness, spreading around you desolation and death; over whom angels might weep and demons do shout, and whom every pious and well-regulated mind shuns, as it shuns the sting of a scorpion or a breath of the plague.

Such, too, is the tongue of *slander*. The slanderer is not merely the idle gossip, he is more. He is the *inventor*, or, what is equally criminal, he is the *propagator* of calumny itself. Envious of a rival, resolved upon shading the lustre, or bent upon the total extinguishment of a star circling in a wider and brighter orbit than his own, he either coins or gives currency to a lie injurious to the character of some public servant of God, or the reputation and happiness of some private individual moving in the quiet and unobtrusive walks of usefulness. Is there not *death* in this unhallowed use of the tongue?—no slaying, power in that false report, that base insinuation, that cruel surmise, that

"Soft buzzing slander, that eats an honest name"?

Most assuredly! The treacherous moth is not a more insiduous and dangerous foe to the beautiful fabric it secretly and slowly destroys, nor the worm a more searching and wasting enemy of the costly vellum whose heart it pierces and devours, than he whose tongue is sharper than a sword,—

"Cutting honest throats by whispers."

It has been truly remarked that against *slander* there is no effectual armour of defence. Nothing is easier than to invent a slander, and nothing more difficult than to annihilate it. It generally selects for its victims the most good and worthy, as the birds

peck at and destroy the best and loveliest fruit. I do not think that Tophet boasts of a darker fiend, or man can deplore a fouler foe than he who deals in it. Like the Indian, it dips its arrows in deadly poison; like Judas, it betrays the innocent with the kiss of perfidy. Assassination is its employment, the guiltless its victims, ruin its sport, and the loud laugh of hell its reward! It is a moral pestilence veiled in darkness, —a thousand fall beside it and ten thousand at its right hand, so unmercifully and deeply wounded as often never to recover the anguish of heart it has occasioned. The demon spirit of slander is thus graphically pourtrayed by a Christian poet:—

> "The man in whom this spirit enter'd was undone:
> His tongue was set on fire of hell; his heart
> Was black as death; his legs were faint with haste
> To propagate the lie his soul had framed;
> His pillow was the peace of families
> Destroyed, the sigh of innocence reproached,
> Broken friendship, and the strife of brotherhood.
> Yet did he spare his sleep, and hear the clock
> Number the midnight watches o'er his bed—
> Devising mischief more; and early rose
> And made most hellish meals of good men's names."[a]

To these must be added the *backbiter*—the calumniator of the absent. Of all evil speaking this is, perhaps, the meanest, the most cruel and dastardly. Taking advantage of the defenceless position of his victim,—

[a] Pollok.

asserting behind his back what he would not dare to utter before his face,—by dark insinuations, by mysterious inuendos, by a tragic tone,—or, as Hannah Moore expresses it, "by a significant shrug of the shoulder,"—the backbiter will give affected importance and authenticity to what all the while he knows to be unfounded in truth; and by this base means do serious and, perhaps, irreparable injury to the character and good name of an innocent, and, it may be, useful servant of the Lord; who, by his absence, is precluded from either defending his innocence or confounding his calumniator. How pointed and pungent are the Divine denunciations of all such,—"*Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh truth in his heart. He that* BACKBITETH NOT *with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbours, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.*" If such only have a place in God's tabernacle, if only such dwell upon His holy hill,—if the slanderer and the backbiter are excluded thence,—alas! how great will be the number thus excluded! How sad and unenviable, then, the character of the evil-speaker, the slanderer, the whisperer, the backbiter, the talebearer, the gossip! What are all these but domestic pests,—propagators of a social moral plague? "*Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongue they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their*

lips." "*O, my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly mine honour be not thou united.*"

Under this head we must class the *anonymous* disseminator of evil. The pen is a powerful auxiliary of the tongue, and gives permanence to its words, as the press gives to them wings. The *anonymous* propagator of evil must be classed among the most dangerous, as the most infamous vipers of the community: he is a *concealed assassin.* An individual may imagine that he sees just reasons for personal concealment in the act of doing a good service; but, even viewed in this point of light, the morality of *anonymous* communications is at best but dubious. What is it but wearing the assassin's cowl,—assuming the murderer's mask? It is the adoption of a mode of doing us a supposed good by a friend, which public sentiment looks upon and condemns as only befitting the secret and sworn foe. If you wish to warn an individual of a danger, or to apprise him of any evil, or to tell him of a fault, three courses are open to you. Either go to him yourself, and tell him; or, write to him, with your signature; or, enlist the office of a mutual friend. If neither of these modes commend themselves to your judgment and feelings, then it is plainly your duty to do nothing. If you are not willing to save an individual, when in your power, at the expense of a little personal feeling, then your friendliness is not sufficient to entitle you to meddle in any way with his affairs. An individual's

name is a guarantee of his honourable and truthful procedure: his name on paper represents himself. Acting thus openly and avowedly, he is invested by a safeguard which silently yet effectually restrains him from many temptations which would sorely assail him if he were consciously unknown. He is, perhaps, restrained from taking a false step, or from committing himself to a dishonourable action, or from doing an unwise thing injurious to himself or another, from a consideration of the compromise in which it would inevitably involve the integrity of his character and the honour of his name.

But what shall we say of the *concealed* foe?—the man who writes unfavourably of a third party; who seeks to separate very friends, to sow the seeds of discord in families, to make mischief in neighbourhoods and in Churches by *anonymous* communications, whether true or false? What can we say of him who, under cover of darkness, thus seeks to stab another's feelings, or reputation, or hopes, but that, in the strong language of God's Word, he is a "*child of the devil*," doing his work with his father's zeal and fidelity. Less than this we dare not say of the individual who has the ineffable meanness to write and propagate slanderous reports and false statements of a fellow-creature, while seeking to escape all responsibility of the cowardly act by concealing his name. It is a species of moral assassination of the deepest dye,

branding the murderer as an outlaw of society; and every good and honest man will so denounce it.

> "The man that dares traduce, because he can
> With safety to himself, is not a man:
> An individual is a sacred mark,
> Not to be pierced in play or in the dark." [b]

From the power of all such our only true deliverance is *prayer*. And whose words so suitable as David's?—"*Deliver me, O Lord from the evil man; preserve me from the violent men which imagine mischief in their hearts; continually are they gathered together for war. They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth: evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him.*"

There is also death in the tongue of the *flatterer*. Not less pointed and scarcely less severe is the portrait which God presents of the character of the flatterer. Thus is he spoken of:—"*He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him that* FLATTERETH *with his lips.*" "*A man that* FLATTERETH *his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.*" "*They speak vainly, every one with his neighbour; with* FLATTERING *lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all* FLATTERING *lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things.*" Such is God's estimate of this character. There are few evils of the tongue

[b] Cowper.

apparently more innocent and harmless, and yet, in reality, more sinful and dangerous than this. The flatterer places the victim of his eulogy in a false position; he invests him with an untrue, ideal estimate of himself. Against this species of praise few are invulnerable: it is natural for men to love adulation. Self-flattery is the idol of the human heart, and before the shrine of this their favourite god men delight that others should worship. However conscious they may be of not possessing the qualities commended, and even penetrating enough to discern the hollowness and insincerity of the adulation, — still, the incense is so fragrant and self-satisfying that, while it is felt to be too exaggerated to be true, it yet is too courtly not to please. How few possess that humility of mind and refinement of feeling that fortifies against its baneful influence! To some delicately formed minds nothing is more painful and offensive than to be covered with the incense of creature-adulation. And yet, offered to whom and however delicately, in all flattery there is *death!* Even the most high-minded and refined are not entirely proof against its injurious effects. Man is a fallen being; and to speak to him of his virtues as many, of his infirmities as few, and of his offences as venial, is to ignore his state as a sinner, to soften and refine away the corruptness of his depraved nature, and to come between him and Christ. It is to cajole him in his self-righteousness, to foster the delusion

that he is "*rich and increased in goods, and has need of nothing,*" blinding him to the solemn fact that he is "WRETCHED, *and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" Surely there is *death* in the tongue of the flatterer!

Not less dangerous and equally reprehensible is *religious flattery*—flattery as addressed to our fellow-Christians. How conspicuous is this spot upon the Christian profession of many! Is there not a strong habit in us of speaking approvingly and applaudingly of each other's piety? to commend the spirituality, religious knowledge, and ripeness of Christian experience? And yet how unconscious we may be of the treacherous snare we lay for the feet of a Christian brother or sister, and in so doing, lay for our own! What almost irreparable injury we are doing to his personal piety! To eulogize his gifts, to commend his graces, to extol his experience, to applaud his achievements and his usefulness, is to mar and impair that lowliness of spirit and abnegation of self with which a Christian man should ever walk before the Lord and before his fellows. The corruption even of a saint of God is still so deep, and his sanctification so imperfect —the old Adam still so strong and the new man so feeble—that, the most gracious are not entirely proof against the injury to their spiritual life to which the tongue of flattery exposes them. To say to one Christian, you wish you possessed his spiritual gifts; to

another, what would you not give to possess his faith; to tell a third, that you envied his power in prayer; a fourth, that he had outstripped you in the Christian race; and to assure a fifth, that his exalted views of Christ and his gigantic grasp of truth put your own spiritual attainments to the blush!—is this language fit to address to a *worm* of the dust, to a fallen creature, to one like ourselves—a debtor to the free and sovereign grace of God? Surely not: it is cruel, unkind, unchristian; it is acting towards a believing brother as the eagle does to the tortoise,—lifting him to a great height but to make his fall the greater. If a brother does not come short in that very gift or grace which you have so unwisely and so highly commended, it is just because Christ has interfered to prevent his fall. "Of all wild beasts, preserve me from a tyrant; and of all tame ones, a flatterer."[c] What is flattery but aiding the work of Satan, the great deceiver of our race? There is a proverb,—"When flatterers meet, the devil goes to dinner." That is, when those traitors to our virtue, happiness, and usefulness confederate against us, Satan's work is so well done that he has time for other employments. Flattery is the food of courts and not the aliment upon which a true humble-minded believer lives. He desires to walk humbly with God; and yet, without courting human adulation, to preserve a good name more precious than ointment among his fellows.

[c] Johnson.

He thus deprecates the evil of flattery, and more especially that of religious flattery. I do not overlook the great difference between a delicate and proper appreciation of piety and merit, and the false and exaggerated praise which in some cases wounds the susceptibility, and in others inflates the vanity of those upon whom it is lavished. To a mind rightly constituted, to a heart in much communion with God, nothing is more painful than undeserved, or even excessive commendation. Yet, as I have remarked, we must discriminate between a fulsome and unmeaning adulation, and kind and encouraging appreciation of those endowments and powers which God has given for the good of man and for the glory of His great name. Thus have we attempted to illustrate the first clause of the text—"*death is in the power of the tongue:*"—a death more bitter, to a holy, high-minded individual, than the fatal dart of the last dread foe. More welcome to him the shadow of the tomb draping all the present, than a life lived on amid the cruel strife of false, and the undying taint of defaming, tongues.

But there is a *theological* view of this first clause of the passage strikingly and solemnly true. There is *death* in the *preaching of the law.* The Word of God is a two-edged sword; the law, in its slaying, condemning power, is one edge of this weapon of divine temper. "*The law worketh death.*" "*I was alive without the law once,*" says the Apostle, "*but when the commandment*

came sin revived and I died. And the commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death." Look not, therefore, O man, O woman, to the works of the law for spiritual life: it is not an instrument of life, but of death,—not of justification, but of condemnation. And he who has broken, and therefore is under the penalty of God's law, yet expects to be saved by it, is as infatuated as the criminal, who, under the sentence of death, yet sues out his pardon upon the footing of that very act of the legislature by virtue of which he is condemned. It was a favourite saying of the Countess of Huntingdon,—"I would run away from the law, considered as a covenant of works, as fast as I would from my sins." The influence of the law upon all religious duties and obedience is much the same as the frost upon the silvery stream: it congeals and hardens them with the rigidity and coldness of death. But the warm rays of the Sun of Righteousness thaws the hardness and dissolves the icy fetters of the soul, and repentance and love then sweetly flow. Oh! see that all your religious duties are evangelical; that is, that they are the result of faith in and of love to Christ. See that they flow from a sight of a crucified Saviour, that they are fruits growing beneath the cross of Immanuel. No fruit of godliness like to that found there! no contrition so deep, no faith so strong, no love so intense, no surrender of the heart so unreserved. Truly they are "*precious fruits brought forth by the sun.*"

There is also *death* in the tongue of him who preaches *false doctrine*. The minister of soul-destroying error is the minister of death. All teaching which is opposed to the Gospel of Christ, which misleads men on their way to eternity by failing to show to them the way of life—all preaching which contravenes the work of the Spirit in regeneration, which substitutes human merit for the atoning work and sacrifice of Christ, which builds up men in their own doings and works as a meritorious preparation for heaven—all pulpit instruction which tends to lower the holiness of the truth, to relax the bond of moral obligation, to suppress, in the professor of the Gospel, an ardent desire after godliness,—we say all such teaching is fatal to souls, and that, therefore, there is death in the power of the preacher's tongue. As you value your eternal well-being go not in the way of such false teachers—these murderers of souls; recoil from them as you would from the wily serpent; reject their ministration as you would the poisoned cup; cease to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge and from the way of life. "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*"

But not less true is the second clause of our text,—"LIFE *is in the power of the tongue.*" God has invested sanctified speech with a life-giving power. There is

a vitality in the hallowed tongue peculiarly its own. This is true of words of kindness and love spoken in cases of mental depression, or on seasons of temporal or spiritual trial. "*Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.*" "*A word spoken in season, how good is it! A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*" Such is the testimony of God's Word! Who will not say there is *life* in that tongue? To go to such a one and speak of Jesus, to unfold the fulness of His grace, to tell of the faithfulness of God to His promises, His unchangeable love to His people, to remind the believing soul of the stability of the covenant, of the certain salvation of all who are in Christ Jesus—Oh! there is life—sweet, soul-uplifting life—in the power of that tongue that speaks to me words of heart-cheer when it is sad, to my mind words of hope when desponding; that tells me of JESUS when going about and inquiring, —"*Have you seen Him whom my soul loveth?*"

There is LIFE in the power of the tongue of him who preaches the Lord Jesus Christ. When we preach Jesus we preach the only true life. Jesus is emphatically the Way of Life—Yea, He is Life itself. "*I have come that ye might have life.*" "*I am the Life.*" "*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear.*" It is impossible, then, to preach the Lord Jesus and not be an instrument of spiritual life. However deficient in acquired lore, and limited in human talent, however unrecog-

nized by the Church and unhonoured by the schools, the man who makes known the Lord Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, possesses a tongue of life at whose irresistible power the tomb of the soul flies open and spiritual death gives up its prey. Was there no life in those precious words of the manacled Apostles, addressed to the trembling jailer at Philippi, in reply to his momentous inquiry,—"*What must I do to be saved?*" "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" But, had the Apostles instructed him to perform some mighty achievement, to do some great thing of himself; had they told him to trust to the mercy of God, to live a pure and honest life, to give alms, to build a synagogue, and, then, by completing his round of meritorious doings, to present himself regularly at the sacramental table; there had not been *life*, but *death* in the answer. Oh who can estimate the awful results of a ministry in which there is *nothing of Christ?* Who can gauge the tremendous consequences of such teaching of immortal souls as proves but a "*savour of death unto death*"? But he who lifts up the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of sinners, His work the only salvation of the soul, His cross the only way to glory,—he who proclaims the all-sufficiency of His merit, the guilt-cleansing efficacy of His atoning blood, the freeness of His grace, the boundlessness of His love, His willingness and ability to save to the uttermost extent of wretchedness and

woe,—preaches the Gospel with a tongue of life! Such a Christ-exalting minister is a "*savour of life unto life.*" Such is the glorious message we proclaim to you, my reader.

Are you anxious about your soul? Are you sin-distressed, guilt-burdened? Do you ask, what you must do to be saved? My answer is based upon a free grace salvation,—Look unto Jesus, and be saved. Come to Christ just as you now are, with no price in your hand, with no self-preparation; meriting nothing, doing nothing; and accept a present and full pardon, a free and perfect justification, all provided for you in Christ. You are to believe not in a doctrine, or in a creed, or in a dogma, or in a Church: but, you are to believe in the Lord Jesus, in a personal Saviour. Christ is the Object of faith, and Christ alone. And will He spurn you, will He reject you, will He cast you out? Oh never! He has given His word; and heaven and earth shall pass away, but *that word* shall never fail,—"*Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.*" Oh, into what perfect peace, into what holy joy, into what assured hope of glory will one act of simple, child-like faith in the Lord Jesus in a moment bring your soul! Try it, my reader: it is your life.

There is LIFE in the tongue of *wise and timely counsel.* It is a great power to be able, with the meekness of wisdom, to advise in the time of perplexity and

doubt; to speak words which shall be as light upon the dreary path of some tried and perplexed child of God, anxious to know and do His will, yet needing the wise and gentle guidance of an experienced, God-fearing friend. If the Lord has conferred upon you this power, use it; and life to some drooping heart, some embarrassed mind will flow in a sacred stream from your words. "*A word spoken in season, how good is it.*"

There is LIFE in the *tongue of kindness, sympathy, and love.* To this many a sad and sorrowing heart, and many a deep, bleeding wound, which words of human sympathy have comforted and healed, will testify. "The law of kindness upon the tongue" is a law of life to the heart whose joys sorrow has withered and whose hope death has slain. Oh, who can describe the exchange of the shroud of woe for the robe of gladness, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness which *one* word of kindness creates? This power is ours! Ours the angel mission of folding around a tempest-tossed soul the wings of love and sympathy. Be faithful to it: no hard task this—nothing easier. Ourselves partaking of the "*kindness and love of God;*" soothed and comforted by the words and sympathy of Christ, we shall know *how* to speak a word in season to a wounded spirit. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth

us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Lord! we accept with cheerful submission the discipline of sorrow, however keen and crushing, which perfects us for a mission so noble, Christ-like, and Divine. If some child of suffering, some son or daughter of grief, shall in future time reap soothing and joy from this sowing in tears, we bow our head meekly to the cup Thy love has ordained, and from our heart would say, —"Thy will be done!"

My dear reader, let this be the practical conclusion of the whole matter,—guard your speech, bridle your tongue, seek that grace may be poured into your lips; reflect that *life* and *death* are enthroned upon this member. Think how great a fire *one* spark may kindle! Ever remember before you speak, that you are in the presence of God: that Christ hears you, and that an angel stands by to record your words in a book, and that, "*every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*" "*Set a watch at the door of my lips, lest I speak unadvisedly with my tongue. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*" And let David's holy, determined reso-

lution be ours:—"*He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.*" And may the characters of those who shall abide in the Lord's tabernacle, and dwell in His holy hill, belong to us:—"*He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour, but in whose eye a vile person is contemned.*"

Lord! purify my lips with a living coal from off thine altar; and ever grant that my speech may be seasoned with the salt of thy grace, that it may administer instruction, edification, and comfort to those that hear!

"One angry moment often does what we repent for years,
It works the wrong we ne'er make right by sorrow or by tears;
It speaks the rude and unkind word, it wounds the feeble breast,
It strikes the reckless sudden blow, it wounds the household rest.
The hand of Peace is frank and warm, and soft as ringdove's wing,
And he who quells an angry thought is greater than a king;
Shame to the lips that ever seek to stir up jarring strife,
When gentleness would shed so much of Christian joy through life."

THE GIFT OF SUFFERING.

PHIL. i. 29.

"Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

"I LOVE my sufferings," remarked one of the most pious and gifted female writers of her day, "for they come from God. I love everything that comes from Him."[a] Doubtless, this eminent saint was familiar with the passage which suggests our present reflection, to the confirmation of which she brought her personal experience. "*Unto you it is* GIVEN *in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to* SUFFER *for His sake.*" There is, probably, no point of light in which suffering is less viewed by believers than this, and yet not one more consolatory. There is always a peculiar charm in a *gift*. It is the acknowledged token of friendship, the silent expression of love. It may in itself be but a trifle, yet how expressive and precious! You would believe that the individual who presented you with a lock of hair, or a simple flower, or a picture,

[a] Hannah More.

regarded you with interest, and held you in sacred remembrance. Now it is just in this point of view we wish you to contemplate the afflictive dealings of God. "*Unto you it is* GIVEN ... *to* SUFFER." God has given us many precious gifts; but I believe, that next to the unspeakable gift of His beloved Son, we shall thank and praise Him the loudest in heaven for the *gift of suffering!*

Let us in this brief meditation first direct our thoughts to the *gift* itself,—it is SUFFERING. That suffering should universally prevail, is simply to remark that *sin* universally prevails. Sin and suffering are convertible terms. They bear the same relation to each other as cause and effect. There was no bodily or mental suffering in the primal or sinless state of man. Prior to the fall both the body and mind were total strangers to pain. Perfect holiness was another expression for perfect freedom from all the ills bequeathed to us by our sinning father, of which we are the sad legatees. But we must restrict our thoughts on this subject. Universal as is suffering, is the sentiment equally as universal that suffering is a Divine appointment? is it regarded and acknowledged as a gift of God? Just the contrary is the feeling of the unregenerate world. They regard it as an unmerited infliction, as an unjust and arbitrary act of God. Viewed in this light, they fly in the face of God, impeach His wisdom, deny His goodness, and dispute

the justice and sovereignty of His will. To this may be traced the different reception of suffering by the Christian and the worldling. The suffering Christian falls down in lowliness and submission at the feet of God; the suffering worldling flies up in anger and hostility in His face. The rod in the one case is all budding, in the other it is all bare; in the one, affliction is unto *life*, in the other, it is unto *death*.

The sufferings of the Lord's people are *many*. The terms which indicate this truth are expressive:—"many waters," "much tribulation," "all Thy waves and Thy billows," "the sufferings of Christ abound in us." Thus, the recipe of our Heavenly Physician is compounded of many and divers ingredients, all of which work together for the spiritual and eternal health of the soul.

From *bodily suffering* none are entirely exempt. All are more or less its subjects. The seeds of disease, which are but the germs of suffering, are sown in every human constitution, and sooner or later yield their own sad fruit. There are few dwellings in which there is not a sick chamber, few homes in which there is not a loved one the subject of disease in some one of its many forms. But sickness is God's messenger, bent upon a mission of mercy and of love. It may wear a cold repelling aspect, for our visitation of sickness is not for the present joyous, but grievous. The painful convulsion, the maddening

delirium, the hectic fever, the waste and decay, the nervous irritability, the incessant anguish, the restless days and the sleepless nights, the lingering, dying languor, is not a discipline the spirit would choose or the flesh would welcome. Nevertheless, it must be right, and it will result in good, because our Heavenly Father sends it. In this light view your present sickness, suffering saint! Little would you taste of the inexpressible sweetness of that precious grape-cluster bending down from our Living Vine—"*He bare our sicknesses*,"—but for your present suffering. The wasting of decay, the pain of disease, the languor of prostration, the trembling, quivering nerve, must in measure be experienced, to experience what the sympathy of Jesus is in sickness.

Perhaps, a yet more acute form of suffering is the *mental*. I think this is indisputable. The *mind* resting in God, confiding, peaceful, hopeful, will enable the body to endure almost any form or degree of suffering. Take, for example, the "noble army of martyrs," as witnesses of this truth. What was it that enabled many of them to kiss the stake, to toy with the leaping flames, and to glory in the consuming pile, from which they ascended up, as in a chariot of fire, to heaven, save the love of Christ, and the peace of God keeping their hearts and minds tranquil, even joyful, amid their tortures? "*The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*" "A wounded

spirit!" ah! it lowers the loftiest, weakens the strongest, humbles the proudest: *who* can bear it?

Mental depression receives its complexion very much from the causes which produce it. The mind is a marvellous and mysterious thing. There is no part of our organism more vital, sensitive, and subtle than it. It is the barometer of the soul, affected by every atmospheric feeling through which we pass. We possess nothing more keenly, acutely sensitive. The causes from whence mental suffering arises are many. With some of the Lord's people the origin is hereditary, with others it is natural, and with yet more it is religious. But, from whatever it may arise, mental suffering in some form is the discipline appointed by God for many of His people. Think not that your case is singular, or that you are an especial object of your Father's displeasure, because he has so afflicted you. I will not pause to inquire the cause of your mental depression; it is enough for my purpose in penning these remarks to know that yours is a mind depressed, needing a gentle, yea, a Divinely healing touch. He who created your mind, who has hitherto proved its Sustainer, knows the cloud that veils it, the tumult that agitates it, the imaginations that play around it like hideous spectres,—all is known to God!

And think you that Christ is either ignorant of, or insensible to, the *spiritual* exercise through which your mind may be now passing? Far from it. If there is

any stage of our discipline for heaven with which the Lord Jesus more closely sympathises than another, it is our spiritually-mental stage. Can He ever forget the mental conflict of the garden, the soul-travail of the cross; the blood-sweat of the one, the soul-sorrow of the other? Child of God! walking in mental gloom, passing through deep waters of soul exercise,—doubting, fearing, despairing, sinking,—look up! There is One who knows your sorrow, and has come down to rescue you. His eye of compassion is upon you, His wing of love is around you, His arms of power are beneath you, His heart is your pavilion, His wounds your refuge, His precious promise the word upon which He invites you to hope. Dwell upon the solemn thought that, your Lord and Saviour trod this identical path before you; that, if there is one cloister of His heart deeper and warmer than another, in that cloister He hides you while passing through this mental eclipse. Fear not that He will abandon you to total darkness or endless despair. Your soul will emerge from its present obscuration, all the brighter for its temporary darkness. Tempest-tossed, you will be all the more firmly rooted and grounded in God's love. The Lord by this process is deepening the work of grace in your heart, consuming the dross with the fire, and scattering the chaff with the flail of His discipline, that had too much, and unsuspected by yourself, mingled with your Divine and heavenly nature. Deem yourself not a child of

God, because you are the subject of mental disquietude and of spiritual exercise. Were your soul still locked in the sleep of death, it would be Satan's policy to keep you so. But the mental and spiritual exercises through which you are now passing are indices of soul vitality, of an awakening out of sleep, of the possession of that spiritual life, which is linked indissolubly with the life which is to come.

Suffering is the *royal highway* to glory. It is royal, for the King of Saints Himself trod it; it is royal, for the seed-royal all walk in it; it is royal, for it leads to the kingdom of heaven. Our text distinctly speaks of one particular form of suffering,—suffering for Jesus' sake. "*To suffer for His sake.*" This, I imagine, is the highest distinction the Lord can put upon His saints this side of heaven. The early Christians "*rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake.*" The cross was heavier then than it is now, its offence was greater, its crucifixion keener. To own the Saviour then was to be cast out as evil, to suffer the loss of kindred and of substance, and frequently to be immured in a dungeon, chained to a stake, or impaled upon a tree. And yet the early followers of the Saviour gloried in sufferings for their Lord. But *ours* is a smoother path, an easier Christianity, a more pleasant cross, a lighter burden than theirs. Certainly, the present is not the age of martyrdom, or of martyrs. This may ac-

count, in a great measure, for the false religion, the bald profession, the sickly Christianity, the specious holiness everywhere so prevalent. And yet "*the offence of the cross is not ceased.*" "*For they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" There is still a degree of suffering to be endured from the ungodly world, and even from a portion of what is called the "religious world," by those who would be loyal to Christ's Person, faithful to His pure truth and spiritual worship. We cannot come out of Babylon, separate ourselves from the world, set our faces as a flint against the errors that are so rife, and the religious formalism that is so prevalent, and the Romanistic worship that is so common, and the superstitions that are so popular—all so opposed to the Divine religion and the spiritual Church of Christ,—and not be reproached for Christ's sake. But, we have still the example and the precept of Jesus for our encouragement and imitation:—"*Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.*" Think of our blessed Lord—the holy, the loving, the gracious Saviour,—cast out as an accursed being from Jerusalem! Then, think of the privilege, yea, the honour of going unto Him, outside the camp of this ungodly, Christ-rejecting, Babylonish world, bearing His reproach. Precious privilege! distinguished honour!

Such may be yours, dear reader. You may now be walking in this identical path; you may be separated from your brethren, as Joseph was; you may be subjected to the loss of earthly goods, experience the chilled affection, the changed friendship, the suspicious glance, the unkind remark, the unjust, ungenerous rebuke of those who should be the first to honour your fidelity to conscience, your adhesion to truth, and your attachment to Christ. But be not surprised, as though some strange thing had happened unto you. Such honour have all the saints. Christ will not leave you alone in the hour of trial and suffering for Him. His presence and grace are pledged to you here; and a crown of glory, studded with many a precious jewel, is laid up for you hereafter. "*Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it.*" So spake the Lord, and His words will be found true!

Suffering is involved in all we do for Jesus. There never was service for God without sacrifice, or a path of duty without a cross, good done for others apart from self-denial in ourselves. The precious seed we here sow—the earnest of a golden harvest,—must be saturated with tears. We must work, with conscious infirmity and unworthiness in ourselves, against much resistance and opposition from others, and in view of great difficulty and discouragement springing from

our work. In all we do and endure for Christ, we must keep in memory the cross upon which He died, and endured for us. Forward, then, let us go in the service of our Master. Work while it is day; the night cometh. Never be without something in hand for the Lord. When one mission is accomplished, when one work is finished, seek another at His hand. My reader, what are *you* doing for Christ? Is it the true, earnest prayer of your heart,—"*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*" Then He will show you what you shall *do*, perchance what you shall *suffer*. O be not a loiterer in the vineyard, a drone in the hive, hiding your light and burying your talents, for all of which the Master, when He comes, will hold you accountable. "*Why stand ye all the day idle,*" when in a forlorn world there is so much to do for man, and in a redeemed Church so much to do for God?

But we are to look at suffering in a peculiarly soothing and sanctifying point of light,—as the *gift* of God. "*Unto* YOU *it is* GIVEN *on the behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*" Faith in Christ is here represented equally as *a gift*. We must not forget that, "*faith is the* GIFT *of God,*"—one of those most costly and precious gifts that cometh down from the Father of lights. Seeing, then, that you need faith—for without it nothing is pleasing to God,—seeing that this is the *foot* that travels to Christ, and the *hand* that receives Christ, and the *eye* that looks at

Christ, let us go to God and ask this divine, precious, grace at His hand, since it is His free and gracious gift. And where real faith exists there will also be true suffering. Every grace of the Spirit in us must be subjected to trial—for, "*the Lord trieth the righteous,*" and no single grace of the Holy Ghost is, perhaps, subjected to more severe trial than *faith.* "*The trial of your faith being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire.*" But in what manner and for what purposes are we to regard *suffering* as God's *gift?* And first,—

Suffering is the gift of *love.* All God's gifts to us are such; but it is our mercy to regard *suffering* peculiarly in this light. It is not for the moment pleasant; it lights not upon us with the soft, snowy pinion of the dove, but with the rough, dark wing of the raven. It wears a sombre aspect, assumes a threatening form, is bitter in its taste and harsh in its tone. Like the loving brother Joseph, it speaks to us 'roughly.' Nevertheless, it is the gift of a Father who loves us too well to be unkind. "*As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.*" Afflicted saint of God! in this soothing light I bid you view your present suffering. If God did not love you He would not deal with you thus. Sound the depth and estimate the tenderness of His love by the nature and intensity of your suffering. *Because* He *loves* you He thus smites. Jesus bore all for you; O yes, *all!* He exhausted the ful-

ness of the curse, sheathed in His own heart the sword of Justice, quenched with His own blood the fire of hell, drained the cup of wrath of its last drop, then filled it with salvation, and breathing the fragrance of His love upon its brim, gave it you freely to drink. Receive, then, this cup of love, disguised as a cup of suffering, and say,—"*The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*"

Suffering is equally the gift of God's *wisdom.* His wisdom, too divine to err, ordained it. In nothing of our history is God's wisdom more conspicuous than in devising and arranging its each act. This fact often rises before us with startling effect; we are compelled to stand still and acknowledge the shaping of Divinity. There has been exhibited such prescience and design, such forethought and harmony as forces from us the acknowledgment, "This is the finger of God!" In this light, beloved, would we teach you to view your present suffering. The first pressure of your lips to the brim may raise for a moment the question,—"Could Divine wisdom have appointed this cup? There is so much apparent incongruity in the event, the skein of circumstances giving it birth is so entangled, the network is so curiously wrought, the whole so dark and inexplicable, so sudden, unlooked for, and crushing; can it be possible that the mind of God conceived and planned and arranged it all?" O yes, thou suffering saint! "*This also cometh from the Lord*

of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Rest assured that God's wisdom was never more displayed than in arranging all the minutiæ of this event. He saw the end from the beginning, knew what it would cost you to bear, and was well assured of the result that would ensue; and in the infinite depths of His wisdom conceived and planned and executed the whole. Be still, and charge not God foolishly; but remember that, "*wisdom is justified of her children,*" and that, the "*Judge of all the earth must do right.*"

Not less are we taught to view God's afflictive dispensations — suffering among them — as the gifts of His *faithfulness.* "*In faithfulness hast Thou afflicted* me," is the response of David. In nothing is the Divine faithfulness more exhibited than in the chastenings of our God. Faithfulness to His covenant, faithfulness to His word, and faithfulness to His people demand this at His hands. O yes, there is no breaking of His word of promise, no falsifying of His covenant engagement, no dealing untruthfully, unfaithfully with thee, thou suffering disciple of Jesus, thou afflicted child of God, in the present painful discipline through which you are passing. In this matter, "*Righteousness is the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.*" Accept, then, this trying dispensation, as another evidence among ten thousand that God will never leave nor forsake you; that, He is faithful that

hath promised; and let your faith behold, sparkling amid the wreck and gloom of this calamity, the lustre of a love that cannot change, of faithfulness that cannot fail.

Receive then, beloved, at God's hand this sacred, costly GIFT! "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;*" and high up in the inventory of these precious gifts place, as the most fruitful and sanctifying of all, *the gift of suffering.* Suffering is our school in which, like our Lord, we are made perfect. Suffering is the school in which alone we learn experimentally the sympathy of Christ. I have already reminded you that, "the road to heaven is the royal road of the cross." Along this thorny, entangled path we trace the "royal priesthood," following the destinies of their glorious Leader, the Captain of their salvation. Fight on, thou soldier of Jesus! you follow the standard of a victorious Chief who will lead you from victory to victory, from suffering to joy, from grace to glory, and finally make you more than conqueror, yea, triumphant, through Him who hath loved you.

We may spread our couch with roses,
And sleep through the summer day;
But the soul that in sloth reposes,
Is not in the narrow way.

If we follow the chart that is given,
We never need be at a loss,
For the only way to heaven
Is the "royal way of the cross."

To one who is reared in splendour
The cross is a heavy load,
And the feet that are soft and tender
Will shrink from the thorny road.
But the chains of the soul must be riven,
And wealth must be held as dross,
For the only way to heaven
Is the "royal way of the cross."

We say we will walk to-morrow
The path we refuse to-day,
And still with our lukewarm sorrow
We shrink from the narrow way.
What heeded the chosen 'eleven'
How the fortunes of life might toss,
As they followed their Master to heaven
By the "royal way of the cross"?

THE BEREAVED HOME.

JOHN xi. 21.

"Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

IF ever home was honoured and blest it was the home of Bethany. *"Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."* Thither, sad and weary, He would often repair—gently lift the latch and enter. No guest more welcome; for none was the humble repast more cheerfully laid—for none was so loved as He. And, as He stepped across its lowly threshold we almost hear Him say, "No unkindness, no rebuke, no upbraiding *here!*"

But the home of Bethany was *bereaved.* Death had entered its domestic circle: had disturbed its centre, removed its head, and quenched its brightest light. Lazarus, the beloved brother, was *dead,*—and Bethany was truly a house of mourning. But Jesus was there—and there too as the chief mourner. His friend Lazarus was dead. It was a common bereavement. The sisters had been bereaved of a brother, Jesus of a friend. The sorrow of one was the sorrow

of each: towards one centre their sad thoughts and their bereaved affections converged: theirs was a mutual grief. And yet we trace a dissimilarity. The sorrow of each partook of the different features of each character. The sorrow of Martha was impassioned and reasoning; that of Mary was shrinking and meditative; that of Jesus was profound and still. Martha gave vent to grief in words, Mary in retirement, Christ in sympathy. I have said that Jesus was the chief mourner in this bereaved home. He was so because his sensibility as man was of a deeper cast; more pure and therefore more intense. His human sympathies, free from all the taint of sin and selfishness, were more exquisitely keen and tender than throbbed in any other breast. And yet with the emotions of both—the grief of Martha which found expression in words, and with that of Mary which found vent in tears —*Jesus sympathised.* With the one sister He calmly discoursed, with the other He silently wept, burying His own grief in the deep, silent cloisters of His loving heart.

Turn we now to the subject suggested by this touching narrative. Our homes are often BEREAVED HOMES! Where is there one exception? In the course of time it must be so. Our domestic circle cannot always remain unvisited, the family ties cannot always exist unbroken by death. At one time or another the pale messenger enters our roof, and, bowing to his in-

exorable summons, we are borne away to the house appointed for all living. Funerals *must* darken our doors. How hard often to believe that this *will* be so! We cannot force upon ourselves the thought that these precious links will ever be sundered. Separation from them seems the last reflection that we indulge, the last idea that crosses our minds.

They seem too lovely and too loved ever to die! The home seems too bright ever to be draped with the shadow of death; the family circle too united ever to be sundered by the ruthless messenger; the dwelling too joyous and vocal with the loud and merry laugh ever to become a house of mourning! But, alas! what household, never so bright or united or happy, but, sooner or later, is called to yield some loved member of its circle to the irresistible demand of the enemy? How often, too, in the all-wise providence of God, that the one chosen is the *last* we had thought would leave us! The one we felt we could the least spare —the one that seemed so essential to the unity of the family, who so knitted and bound together all the rest, our heavenly Father sees fit to call. Such must, necessarily, be the history of our families. And since no home is so strongly fortified by youth or manhood, by rank or wealth, by loveliness or piety, as effectually to resist the invasion of the last enemy, let us have wisdom to learn the *lessons* our God—the God of the families of the whole earth—would teach

us, and glean the *consolations* He would convey to us in the family bereavements, with which, in the righteous administration of His government, He sees fit to visit us.

Is not the first and most obvious lesson that of *submission?* This is, perhaps, the most difficult one of all,—we are such self-willed, wayward children. The moment the human will is crossed there is rebellion. Whether it be the will of a child under the restraint of parental authority, or the will of a people under the government of a sovereign, or the will of God's saints under the higher and diviner rule and discipline of their Heavenly Parent, there is a natural and powerful tendency to rebel. But the lesson which the bereaved child of God is to learn is that which David so beautifully and touchingly exemplified—"*Surely I behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of its mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.*" Higher still is the example of our true spiritual David—David's Lord and Christ—"*The cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it? O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.*" The moment the will is thus brought into a perfect, and even *cheerful*, acquiescence with the Divine will, all rebellion ceases, and the bereaved heart lies passive in God's hands. And this is more than half the comfort we receive in our domestic calamities. There is no comfort, no peace, no quiet-

ness, so long as there is the slightest collision of our will with God's will. The least vibration of hostility jars the music that breathes from the holy blending. But, the moment we recognize the truth, "HIMSELF *hath done it*," so fully convinced are we that He hath done all things well—that His decision is the result of infinite wisdom, of parental love, of Divine faithfulness, of unimpeachable righteousness,—we lay down our stricken hearts upon the heart of God, and all is peace.

Mark that weaned infant enfolded within its mother's arms! How safely it lies, how softly it breathes, how sweetly it slumbers, reclining upon that gentle bosom! What a lovely image of innocence, confidence, and peace! So let our sad and bleeding hearts, smitten of God and afflicted, repose upon the bosom of Jesus. "*And Aaron held his peace.*" "*I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it.*" "*The beloved disciple who also leaned upon His breast.*" Where else can a weary child repose? To whom can we repair, with our weight of sin, and our burden of sorrow, and rebelliousness of spirit, but to Christ? He invites us to the repose of His loving heart, to the rest which His atoning work imparts, to the sympathy which flows from His compassionate nature.

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast.

I came to Jesus as I was,—
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad."

If submission to God in our domestic bereavements be the first lesson we should learn, *love to one another* should be the second. God often sends family afflictions, especially in the form of bereavement, in order to draw more closely together the family ties. There is, alas! in many homes, a great lack of family affection. The dissentions and broils that exist; the want of real love, with all the sad results of alienated feeling,—cold, unsympathizing address,—selfishness, covetousness, unkindness, and wounding—are sad blots upon the family escutcheon of many homes. But God sends domestic adversity,—sometimes in the form of a reversion of temporal position,—sometimes it is the inroad of sickness,—at other times, the home ties are severed by distance of place; but, more stern and painful than all—is the form of *bereavement.* And what is a practical and holy lesson God would then teach us?—to "*love as brethren.*" As tie after tie of the home-circle is severed: as one by one passes into eternity, God would have those who yet remain draw closer and closer to one another, and nearer and nearer to Himself. O how passing solemn are family afflictions, especially the visitation of death! To follow to the grave a venerated parent,—a loved husband,—a fond wife,—an affectionate brother,—a devoted sister,—a promising

child,—O these are terrible wrenches, heart-crushing sorrows. How closely it brings us to eternity! Whither are these loved ones gone? Their places at our hearths, and at our tables are vacant,—significantly, impressively vacant—and know them no more. We enter their chambers,—we search where we have been wont to meet them, but we see them not,—we call, but they answer not,—we wait the meal, as if they would appear—they come not! Where are they? Gone into eternity! Soon we shall follow. What tie will next be ruthlessly severed? Who will next be summoned? Seeing we know not which one, or how soon, let us love one another more fervently; let us cherish the relations that remain more fondly; and seek to promote each other's happiness and comfort and well-being more unfeignedly. This will save us many an aching pang when they are gone.

Our own *personal preparation for death* surely is a lesson death itself most imperiously and solemnly enforces. We must soon follow. We are like sheep grazing in a field, waiting for the slaughter. Each day the messenger enters, and drives one and another away to the shambles, until gradually all are gone. And yet those which still remain for awhile graze on heedless of the fact that to-morrow *their* turn may come. So death enters our domestic enclosures, and marks one to-day and another to-morrow, gradually lessening the house-

hold number, until there are no more to die. The great and momentous question is,—Am I prepared to die? I wait my turn,—am I ready? Am I converted? Have I felt myself a sinner? Have I fled to Christ? Am I safe in Him? Do I believe in Him with my whole heart? Is Jesus precious to my soul, is He all my salvation, and all my desire? Do I, in a word, love the Saviour truly, devotedly, supremely? and am I living and labouring and hoping as a disciple and follower of Christ,—as one whose treasure is in heaven, and whose heart, in sweet communion and longing desire and growing holiness, is where its treasure is? Our true, saving, sole preparation is alone in Christ. If we are washed in the blood of Christ, and are justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ, and are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, and are living as the regenerate children of God, and as new creatures in Christ Jesus, then death will not be to us an unwelcome messenger. We may depart suddenly, but not unpreparedly. Death will find us in Christ, accepted in Him, hid in Him, saved in Him; and when we die, the blessedness will be ours of those "*who die in the Lord.*"

Admit the Saviour to your bereaved home. The house of mourning had more attraction to Him when on earth than the house of feasting. It is so with Him now. He is by this very domestic bereavement, knocking at your door, asking to be admitted. He con-

descendingly stands and asks to enter. O admit Him to the home of woe. He comes to soothe and comfort and succour. He comes to bless, to sanctify, to save. He comes with hands laden with gifts, with a heart melting with compassion, with a nature overflowing with grace. Rise, and bid Him welcome. With Martha prepare Him good entertainment. With Mary sit humbly at His feet and hear His words. The season of bereaved sorrow is a most propitious time to become acquainted with Jesus, to form a friendship with the Son of God, to enter into an alliance with the Saviour. O suffer not these golden hours to pass unimproved. "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock.*" Death has crossed your threshold, Jesus quickly follows! He comes to repair the ravage, to supply the void, to heal the wound, to soothe and sanctify the grief death has made. O if out of this "eater" there shall come forth "meat,"—if from this evil good shall be evolved,—if this dark cloud upon your household, this shadow of death upon your heart, should be gilded with the "hope of glory," will you not through time and eternity bless God for a bereaved home?

Has it pleased God to remove from yours its head of power,—its centre of influence,—its source of supply? Remember that He has not withdrawn Himself. He may have written you a widow, or fatherless, or an orphan; but He is the widow's God, and in Him the fatherless findeth mercy. His precious

promise is,—"*Leave thy fatherless children, and let thy widows trust in Me.*" What a legacy for a Christian man to bequeath to God—a helpless widow, a fatherless family! He will prove kind and faithful to the trust. Only believe in Him. He has never yet falsified Himself, has never violated His word of promise, and you shall not be the first to charge Him with having proved unfaithful to the confidence reposed in Him,—reposed in Him by a poor and desolate widow, by a bereaved and helpless orphan.

How appropriate and precious in the home bereavement is *the sympathy of Jesus!* Perhaps the most touching attitude of our Lord in the domestic grief of Bethany—or the most sublime spectacle of His life—is His weeping at the grave of Lazarus. "Jesus wept." The Son of God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Maker of all things, the upholder of all worlds, in tears! Marvellous spectacle! Such is the sympathy of Christ with our human race. It is a great boon for us to have—a precious truth for us to receive—a priceless blessing for us to experience. There is nothing that can possibly be its substitute. Human sympathy is inexpressibly sweet, and gratefully welcome; but the grief of bereavement is often too fathomless for its line of compassion to sound, the pain too deep for its tenderness to soothe. We must have Christ, and we *do have* Him! Yes; that very same Saviour whose tears fell fast and warm upon the grave of His buried friend,

who had tears for the mourning sisters, tears for the saddened disciples, tears for the unbelieving Jews, and tears for Himself—for, as I have said, He stood the Chief Mourner at that grave,—even He has tears, bereaved one, for *you*. The sympathy of Christ with our sorrows is not a mere sentiment, a transient emotion, a passing tear quickly shed, and as quickly dried. O no! His are the tears of a love that once wept tears of blood for us. His is a compassion that sustains, as well as comforts, that sanctifies as well as soothes. The sympathy of Christ has a soul-transforming effect, a Divinely assimilating power,—it makes us Godlike. And, oh! to be Godlike—to be changed into the same image from glory to glory! what though "friend after friend departs,"—what though tie after tie of domestic love is broken,—if *this* be but the hallowed, the blessed result! Cling to the sympathy of Christ. Nestle beneath His soft wing—it will enfold and shelter you until these calamities be overpast.

Let us be comforted by reflecting upon the glory into which our departed ones who died in the faith of Jesus have entered; and let us strive to gain that heaven of glory whither they are gone. They are not here, they are with the Lord. All their sins and sorrows and trials and infirmities and temptations are passed, and they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, nor battle more with sin, or Satan, or the world. They are with Christ the Lord. With

Him they will come when He shall appear in the clouds of heaven with all the saints; for He will bring with Him all them who sleep in Him. Let us comfort one another with this glorious prospect. Until then, He who mourned with the loved ones in the home of Bethany, and wept over the grave of Lazarus, mourns and weeps with you. Turn from the gloom and mystery of your bereavement, and lose yourself and it in the loving, sympathizing Saviour.

"Thou! who art touch'd with feeling of our woes,
Let me on Thee my heavy burden cast,—
My aching, anguish'd heart on Thee repose,
Leaving with Thee the sad mysterious past!
Let me submissive bow, and kiss the rod;
Let me 'be still, and know that Thou art God.'

"Why should my harass'd, agitated mind,
Go round and round this terrible event;
Striving in vain some brighter side to find,
Some cause why all this anguish has been sent?
Do I indeed that sacred truth believe,
Thou dost not willingly afflict and grieve?

"Infinite wisdom! can it ever err?
Infinite love! can it to us work ill?
Good, only good, dost Thou, my God, confer,
Tho' it to me, alas! seem evil still:
Oh! let not finite, frail, presumptuous man,
Thine acts arraign—Thy hidden purpose scan.

"Oh! pity me, all crush'd beneath the blow,
Thus weeping o'er this sad, mysterious blight;
My garden's richest, fairest plant laid low,
Gemm'd with its dewy blossoms sparkling bright;
Just when its roseate blooms were set for fruit,
Stricken and shatter'd at the very root.

"There are none like it left, and earth appears
So stripp'd, so desolate, without its charms,
A barren waste, a mournful vale of tears,
That, were I not supported by Thine arms,
My pitying Saviour! this poor heart would break!
Oh! shield—oh! comfort, for Thy mercy's sake.

"My lovely gourd is wither'd in an hour!
I droop, I faint, beneath the scorching sun:
My Shepherd, lead me to some sheltering bower—
There, where Thy little flock 'lie down at noon;'
Tho' of my dearest earthly joy bereft,
Thou art my portion still—Thou, Thou, my God, art left!"

THE

INFLUENCE OF COMPANIONSHIP.

PROVERBS xiii. 20.

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

GOD has made us *social* beings. He has implanted in every bosom a desire for companionship. Man was never intended to be an isolated thing, a hermit, or recluse. When God created Adam, having furnished him with all the attributes of a social being, He met this necessity of his nature by the creation of Eve, whom He brought to him henceforth to be his equal, his companion, and friend,—"another self, a kindred spirit, with whom he might lessen his cares by sympathy, and multiply his pleasures by participation." Not only is there this social craving of our nature, but there is sown in us all a strong desire to reproduce ourselves by the influence which our own hearts and minds bring to bear upon others. This is a sort of moral transmigration of which, more or less, we all have the power,—the power of moulding the mind, shaping the opinions, ruling the affections, and

influencing the lives of our fellows to our own. In no passage of God's Word is this truth more forcibly brought out as in the one the exposition of which is now to engage our attention. In it two different characters are portrayed, and the influence which each one exerts upon others is described. The "wise"—making wise: the "fool"—destroying fools. Here each character is represented as reproducing itself in others. "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*" What an appropriate and solemn subject is this for our consideration, especially of the young! Love of society, or craving for companionship, is a natural and strong impulse of youth. And yet this very companionship—so great blessing when wisely and holily directed—has proved one of the most fatal rocks in the voyage of life, upon which many a gallant youth has made shipwreck for time and for eternity. In view of a subject so practical, important, and solemn, may the Holy Spirit guide and bless our meditation! Let us present both of these characters—the "wise" and the "foolish"—in contrast.

The first character delineated in the passage is, *the wise man.* Who is the wise man? He is not necessarily a learned or intellectual man; a man of literary attainments and scientific acquisition. Knowledge and wisdom are not convertible terms. Learned men are not always wise men. Knowledge is what we ac-

quire by study, research, and education; wisdom is the power of applying that knowledge to the best and highest end. We may have much knowledge with little or no wisdom, and much wisdom with but limited knowledge. Just as a man may have physical strength and energy to fell the tree or quarry the marble, without the genius or the skill to carve the one, or to chisel the other.

But who is the truly "wise man"? God has given to man a natural, or worldly wisdom, which, although essentially differing from, and infinitely inferior to, the "*wisdom of the just*," is not to be denied or ignored. Our Lord Himself recognised it when He said,—"*The men of the world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.*" But I wish more especially to speak of the "*wisdom that cometh down from above;*" for the "*wisdom of this world*," necessary and valuable as it is in conducting the affairs of the present life, is "*foolishness with God.*" An individual may be a wise man in things appertaining to the life that now is, and a fool in things appertaining to the life that is to come. Let us, then, trace some of the characteristics of the truly wise. And we pray that the Spirit of God may move effectually and convertingly upon the hearts of the young whose eye shall trace these pages, that they may, one and all, become truly "wise unto salvation."

A truly wise man is he who *knows himself*. This

is the first step in true knowledge, though not, as a classical poet has remarked, the greatest. The greatest and most excellent knowledge is to *know Christ.* The grandest of all science, is the science of the Gospel. But the first step in *this* knowledge is to know ourselves to be *sinners.* The first step towards a knowledge of the Saviour, is to know that we are *lost.* We know the worth of a plank when it has floated us safely to the shore. We value the fitness of the life-boat that has rescued us from the wreck. We appreciate the sovereign efficacy of the remedy that has healed us of our disease. It is thus we become *experimentally* acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit reveals to us our sinfulness; makes us acquainted with the plague of our hearts; opens our eyes to the discovery of our moral shipwreck; shows us that the barque we thought so strong and safe is foundering; that the planks we trod so firmly and so proudly are yielding beneath our feet; and that death—eternal death, the death that never dies—stares us grimly, darkly in the face. And now amid the storm the eye descries a speck far off upon the dark waters—it approaches nearer, and grows larger: lo! it is the *life-boat* hastening to our rescue. How welcome its arrival! How beautiful to the eye does it appear! But, the enquiry arises: "May I *trust* it? Will it battle successfully with the raging billows, and carry me in safety to the shore? Is it for *me?*

May *I* venture into it?" Thus a soul, convinced by the Spirit of its sin, that it is "*ready to perish*," when urged at once to accept the Saviour as able to save it to the uttermost of its lost, undone, and perilous condition, begins to reason,—"Is Jesus *able* to save? Is He *willing* to save? Will He save *me?* May *I* venture my sinful soul in humble faith upon His salvation?" These are questions which often arise at the turning-point of the sinner's salvation. Nevertheless, He who began the good work, carries it on unto completion; and having shown the sinner that he is poor, and wretched, and naked, and miserable, and lost, He shows him Jesus as just the Saviour that he requires; reveals the Cross as the plank that will rescue him from the yawning deep; and then gives him simple faith to take hold of it and be saved. Have you, my reader, reached this first stage of your salvation? Truly this is the first step in divine and heavenly wisdom. He alone is the truly wise man who sees his follies,—the folly of his heart, the folly of trusting to his own works, the folly of seeking to enter heaven upon the babel of his own righteousness. He truly is the wise man who, led by the Spirit to an acquaintance with himself, is, by a subsequent and concluding step in his heavenly teaching, and by the same Spirit, made acquainted believingly and savingly with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The "fool" is he who, ignorant of his spiritual con-

dition as a sinner, not knowing that he has broken God's law by original and by actual transgression, and is therefore under present condemnation, and is exposed to future and eternal punishment, yet lives on in his rebellion and sin: like Galeo of old, "*caring for none of these things.*" He is a "fool" who, when God has "*laid in Zion a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone,*" for sinners to build their hope of heaven upon, rejects this most sure foundation, and rears the fabric of his hope upon the sliding, treacherous, fatal quicksand of his own fancied goodness and merit, and thus is "*in danger of hell fire,*"—he, without the shadow of a doubt, is "*the foolish man.*"

But, as this subject more especially addresses itself to the young, and to *young men* particularly, let me in its further exposition enumerate a few of the more prominent characteristics of the "wise," leaving the reader, by the power of contrast, to portray in his own mind the character of the "foolish."

It is a distinctive mark of a "wise" man that *he possesses a high appreciation of the importance of character.* Such a man knows that *personal character* is, to a certain degree, everything to a young person. That, without it, he is but a wreck, a mere waif on the sea of human life, tossed from billow to billow, no one claiming, no one caring for, no one pitying him. That, he is looked upon in his family as a disgrace, in society as a blot, in the world as a cipher. The wise man

knows that "a good name is better than precious ointment." That a character for uprightness and integrity, for virtue, sobriety, and comeliness, is of more worth to him than the ermine of the Judge, the coronet of the Peer, or the diadem of the Sovereign. The ermine may be sullied, the coronet may be shaded, and the kingly diadem may be the symbol of despotism and cruelty; but, a man of integrity, though poor, who can lift up his head among his fellows without a blush, whose principles and fame no man can justly impeach or gainsay, *he* is a wise man: to know whom is an honour, and to call whom a "friend" is among earth's richest treasures. The "fool" is he who makes light of this priceless, precious jewel—*personal character;* who treats it as the swine does the pearl, trampling it in the mire beneath his feet. He who lives "a fast life," reckless of principle, and honour, and fortune; reckless, too, of the feelings, reputation, and influence of those with whom in life he is closely and endearingly linked; reckless of a father's honour, of a mother's happiness, of a sister's peace; he who deems "a merry life and a short one" the very acme of wisdom, and the *summum bonum* of happiness, *he*, unquestionably, is a "fool" double-dyed. Young man! guard your *character* as your fairest jewel, as your richest birth-right. Rank is not equal to it; wealth cannot purchase it; learning cannot redeem it. *"Keep thyself pure;" "flee youthful*

lusts;" and pray to God that "*uprightness and integrity may preserve*" you. But, if on the contrary, you select as your companions those to whose character there is attached a taint, whose religious sentiments are low, whose moral principles are base, who live in the indulgence of secret vice, in the commission of secret sin; whose influence is vitiating and destructive, you then at once compromise your character and name, and will by society be placed on a footing with your associates. It is a quaint but truthful aphorism,—"Show me your *companions*, and I will tell you what you are."

It is another mark of the truly wise that they regard their physical, intellectual, and moral powers, their endowments of rank, wealth, and influence, as conferred by God: *and, therefore, for God's glory are to be employed.* The great end of man's creation is, "to glorify God here." God created every thing for His praise. "*He hath made all things for Himself.*" He, then, is a truly wise man who fully recognises this solemn truth, and practically lives it. He feels that he is not his own proprietor; that his wealth, and his power to acquire it,—his talents, and his opportunities of employing them,—his influence, and the sphere in which it is exerted, are all the gift of God; and, therefore, are all to be consecrated to the service and glory of the Giver. He is a "fool" who merely imagines that God created him for his own self; that he is his own

proprietor; that he may, therefore, without consulting his Creator, and with impunity, waste, and squander, and prostitute those powers and endowments as he will. O what a "fool" and unfaithful steward is he who buries his talents, be they many or few, in the earth! Reader, you are to give an account of yourself to God! For every talent you possess God regards you as responsible, and Christ holds you answerable. "*Every one of us shall give account of himself unto God.*"

He is truly a "wise" man, *who allows no vice, evil habit, or sin, to enslave him.* A young person, jealous of his character, guarding as with more than vestal watchfulness the golden lamp of his personal reputation, will never allow a low-born principle or vicious propensity to obtain the mastery. He knows to whom, under God, he belongs—to himself; and is resolved—prayerfully, solemnly resolved—that, by God's help, no sin shall claim him as its own; no vice shall rule him as its servant; no evil habit shall enchain him as its slave. Fool and slow of heart to appreciate what is for his highest interests is *he* who lends himself to low-born habits, mingles with loose society, cultivates a companionship that depresses rather than elevates him, indulges in habits of prodigal expenditure and reckless extravagance,—blind to what is due to self-respect, to filial duty, to parental authority, and to home-happiness!

We reach now the *moral influence* which com-

panionship exerts. "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*"

I have already remarked that a desire for association is a natural and powerful instinct of the young. Not more naturally and spontaneously does the gentle vine seek the sheltering wall, or the feeble ivy stretch its tendrils towards the strong oak, than does the young heart yearn for, and go forth to meet and embrace, some kindred self whom it can love, in whom it can confide, and with whom it may associate. Now this only renders the path of a young person all the more intricate, difficult, and perilous. Suppose, in selecting his companions, or forming his friendships, he should make a wrong or fatal choice? Suppose, in the ingenuous, too confiding, and unsuspecting feelings of his young heart, he should admit to his confidence a fiend instead of a friend, a "serpent" instead of a "dove; one who, having obtained an ascendency in his affections, now exerts the influence thus possessed for evil and not for good,—who can calculate the sad results of such a calamity?

But, it is a mark of a truly wise youth that he "walks with the wise." Exercising the rational powers of discernment God has given him, following the virtuous tastes and self-respecting instincts of his nature, he is enabled to discriminate, and to select from the crowd competing for his friendship and companion-

ship, the "wise,"—walking with whom he himself may become wiser. O the blessing of associating in confiding love, and sacred friendship, and sweet communion, with those who are furnished with "*the wisdom that cometh from above, which is first pure, then peaceable;*" who are wise unto salvation; who walk with God, whose fear rules their hearts, and shapes their lives. How powerful for good is their companionship! How sanctifying and far-reaching their influence! Seek, my young reader, your associates, select your friends, from among the virtuous and the good, the holy and the God-fearing, the Christ-loving and the Christ-like. You will by association and intercourse assimilate with their spirit, and grow wiser, holier, and more useful by the all-powerful moulding influence both of their precept and example.

The influence which we all exert is not a matter for us to determine. The fact is certain. That influence is fixed. The great question is, *what kind* of influence shall it be? Since others take their mould from our society, this becomes a solemn question. Happy for us, happy for others, if our piety is so decided, our views of truth so evangelical, our life so holy and useful, that others, beholding it, shall say,—"We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you." Thus it becomes a matter of infinite moment that our *families* should be homes of piety,—our households God-fearing households. And what a mercy if, whether as relations or

as friends, whether as visitors or as domestics, our sojourn is in a house where the fear of God is. Seek such, my reader. Say with David,—"*I am a companion of all them that fear God, and keep His precepts.*" What a wise decision was that of Ruth when she clave to her mother-in-law with the impassioned resolve,—"*Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried.*"

"*But a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*" What true and solemn witnesses to the truth of this are our reformatories and gaols, our hulks, our convict transports, and our penal settlements, and, alas! our public scaffolds! Go and inquire of all the wretched, forlorn, unhappy occupants of these miserable abodes, the *first step* which conducted them—perhaps from high social position, from virtue and prosperity, from home and happiness,—to their present crime, degradation, and shame; and the great majority will reply,—"I became the companion of fools, and they destroyed me! I was ensnared by their hollow reasoning, was fascinated by their insinuating address, was influenced by what I deemed their heroic example, and was seduced by their well-laid schemes,—and my present lamentable condition is the inevitable and sad result!" Turn you, then, from all evil companionship, from all social

association injurious to your principles and character; to your morals, influence, and reputation; to your present and eternal well-being. Shun the *infidel* and an *infidel literature*, as you would the serpent's fang and the impoisoned cup. Keep at an immeasurable distance from the *debauched*, as you would from the man smitten with the plague. "*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" Equally shun the teaching of those *divines* who entertain lax views of the Inspiration of the Scriptures, —who preach false doctrine, and observe a ritualistic and superstitious form of worship. "*Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.*" (Prov. xix. 27.) "*In vain,*" says Christ, "*they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" Bring the doctrines you hear to the test of God's Word. "*Prove* all things by it, and *hold fast* that which is good." Make the Lord's people and Christ's true ministers your friends, associates, and teachers. You will share their benediction and privileges, for God's blessing is upon His people. But, select fools, and persons regardless of religion, and the propagators of error, as your companions and teachers,—and you must inevitably share the destruction of their social position, their blasted reputation, their ruinous influence, and blighted prospects now; and, hereafter, they will be the companions of your misery, and your tormentors for ever. "*He that walketh with wise men*

shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Hearken to the invitation which Moses gave to Hobab, and which the Lord's people address to you: "*We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.*" Accept this invitation to CHRISTIAN COMPANIONSHIP; and the issue will be, happiness in this world, and glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life in the world which is to come.

This subject is solemnly instructive to the saints of God. Let your companionship be decidedly and pre-eminently *Christian*. Much association with half-religionists,—with worldly disciples,—with the cold-hearted, volatile, and frivolous religious professor,—will be to you of incalculable evil. It will naturally and seriously damage your personal piety. Your spirituality and heavenliness of mind will be essentially and sadly deteriorated. It will be utterly impossible for your soul to escape their influence. Imperceptably, and unsuspectingly to yourself, you will grow like them. But, associate with the most pious, holy, and heavenly. Walk in close communion with those who walk in close communion with God. Be much with those who are much in converse with their Bible, who are much anointed of the Spirit, and who live in personal converse with eternal realities. They will

help you heavenward. You may have but *few* Christian companions,—but few of kindred spirit with yourself, who are taught as you are taught, who are tried as you are tried, who are tempted as you are tempted, —nevertheless, if the Lord has given you but *one* spiritually-minded, close-walking fellow traveller, bind yourself to that one; and as iron sharpeneth iron, so will intimate, prayerful converse with that one fellow believer increase your personal piety, advance your heavenliness of mind, divine knowledge, and comfort of spirit.

Let your aim be, in its most exalted sense,—CHRISTIAN COMPANIONSHIP.

"Let others choose the sons of mirth,
To give a relish to their wine;
I love the men of heavenly birth,
Whose thoughts and language are divine.

"O may I see Thy tribes rejoice,
And aid their triumphs with my voice!
This is my glory, Lord, to be
Joined to Thy saints, and near to Thee."

GRACIOUS SURPRISALS.

Song of Solomon vi. 12.

"*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.*"

It is not one of the least conclusive evidences of the truth of the Bible, that a Book written centuries ago should accurately delineate all the delicate lights and shadows of Christian experience, mental and spiritual, through which God's people pass in all future times. So that in reading the recorded experience of the Church when David, and Solomon, and Job, and Nehemiah flourished, we read, as it were, our own at the present moment. The only logical deduction we can draw from it is,—that, the same Divine Spirit has been the Teacher of the saints in every age, and that the hand that recorded their spiritual history upon the sacred page, was guided by an Intelligence higher and Diviner than its own. The passage under consideration, presents a confirmation of this truth. It illustrates a singular but precious chapter of experimental religion,—the *surprisals of grace*, or, those sovereign manifestations and dealings of the

Lord, which so often take His saints by a sudden and unexpected surprise. "*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.*" Many of the Lord's people can set their seals to the truth of this gracious experience. The first thing which arrests our attention, is, *the surprise,*— "*Or ever I was aware.*"

Our whole life may in truth be said to be a *surprise.* To God alone it is known from the end to the beginning. To Him who has predestinated all events, mapped and arranged our entire history; who in the well ordered covenant of grace has anticipated the minutest incident of our life, it is no surprise. Great truth! Mighty thought! "*The council of the Lord that shall stand, and His thoughts to all generations.*" Amid the mysteries and perplexities, the dark and bewildering events of His providence in your personal experience, my reader, let this assurance be as fragrant oil upon the gloomy, broken waters of your pathway,—that, all is known to our God, for all is wisely, lovingly, and righteously ordained and overruled by Him. But to *us,* all is surprise. What individual can forecast the coming events of his history? Who can predict with prescience and accuracy, what may hang upon the next breath he draws, or follow upon the next step he takes? God has wisely and benevolently *veiled* all our future, that we might learn that we are not masters of our position, but

are dependent each moment upon Him. Happy life is this to the child of God, because it is a life of reliance upon a Father who loves him. He is not afraid of evil tidings, for his heart trusteth in the Lord. Thus, in a sense, our whole life is a *surprise*. Events transpire in our history, revolutions occur in our thoughts and feelings, of which no foreshadowings cross our path, and we are "sore amazed," and are made to "drink the cup of astonishment." O how should this fact teach us to walk humbly, watchfully, and prayerfully! How should it check in us all worldly aspirings, all curious peering into our future, and keep us living by the day, by the hour, yea, by the moment, upon our covenant God, accepting in cheerful acquiescence and meek submission, every lesson of His love. But it is less of the surprisals of providence than of *grace*, that we at present would speak.

Conversion is often a gracious surprise. In how many cases is it scarcely less so than it was with Saul of Tarsus. With him it may have been a more instantaneous, but not a more sudden and unexpected event. The Lord is found of those that sought Him not. When we were the least anticipating so great a change; when, perhaps, we were at the time apparently at the farthest remove from converting grace—surrounded by circumstances, and in a state of mind the most unlikely to lead to a result so blessed, the Lord in the sovereignty of His grace, and as if to demonstrate the truth that

conversion is not of man but of God, has surprised us with the effectual call of the Spirit, and we responded, —"*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*" O sweet surprise! O blissful moment! O never to be forgotten hour, when we heard the call of Jesus, or ever we were aware found ourselves weeping in penitence at His feet,—all our rebellion gone, all our hatred annihilated, our weapons of hostility against God and Christ and the Gospel grounded before the all-conquering power of the cross,—grace, free and sovereign grace, triumphant! What a precious surprise, when Jesus drew near, and in all the sweet benignity of His favour, and in all the winning power of His love, spake words of pardon and of peace to our sin-distressed soul. When He revealed Himself to us as willing to receive and able to save us just as we were, and assured us that He was ours, and that we were His. What a gracious surprise was this! Was it not so to Zacchæus, when he climbed the sycamore tree? And to Matthew, as he sat at the receipt of custom? And to Nathaniel, as he prayed beneath the fig tree? And to the malefactor, hanging upon the cross? O yes! grace, Divine and sovereign grace, delights to surprise its objects, and to call them "or ever they are aware," with that effectual call that triumphs over all opposition, overcomes all impediment, leads them captive at its sovereign will, and demonstrates the truth that salvation is of the Lord.

"That was a time of wondrous love,
When Christ my Lord was passing by;
He felt His tender pity move,
And brought His great salvation nigh.

"Guilty and self-condemn'd, I stood,
Nor thought His mercy was so near;
When He my stubborn heart subdued,
And planted all His graces there.

"When on the verge of endless pain,
He gently whispered,—'I am thine;'
I lost my fears and dropped my chain,
And felt a transport all Divine."

Those, too, are gracious surprisals, when the Lord draws near, and "ever we are aware" sweetly manifests Himself to our soul. It is like an unexpected visit from a loved and absent friend. The very surprise lends to it a peculiar sweetness and charm; and we exclaim, with the wondering astonishment of the disciples of old,—"*Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us?*" Are we sensible, beloved, of these gracious visits? Do they form a large proportion of our Christian experience? Let us not settle down upon our lees satisfied without these gracious, sensible discoveries of Jesus to our souls. Many religious professors are content to experience them very seldom; while yet others are content to be without them altogether. He has promised that, in union with His Father, He will come and manifest Himself to His people. (John xiv. 23.) Do we honestly expect Him to fulfil this promise, and

to fulfil it in our personal experience? Do we seek it in earnest prayer, as evidencing the experimental nature of our religion? Do we know what it is to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost? (Rom. v. 5.)

How often, too, are our emancipations from trouble, and our deliverances out of soul-distress and mental depressions, a secret and gracious surprise of Jesus. "Or ever we are aware," some Divine and precious promise is brought home with the power of the Spirit to our hearts; or, a word fitly spoken by a minister of the Gospel, or by a saint of God, has, in a moment, dissolved the dark cloud into sunshine, unclasped the heavy burden from the mind, and the bound and fettered spirit is free. The Lord will ordain deliverances for Jacob, and He knows when to time their coming. It is a sweet thought for the righteous when in their trials, that He is acquainted with their existence—is thoughtfully cognizant of their emergency; and when they can bear no more—when the last feather is about to break the back, and the last drop overflows the cup —when the barrel of meal and the cruise of oil are just come to the end,—that His providence appears, and surprises them with a timely and effectual aid. Watch God in every thing, my reader. Overlook Him not in the small occurrencs of life. See His love, wisdom, and control in the minor as in the major events of your daily history. Who then can harm you? If

God be for you, who can be against you? Stand still, and see His salvation from all your enemies. "*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed.*" What additional worth will attach to the Divine interposition,—how much sweeter will be the promise,—how much more glorious will be the Divine faithfulness,—how increasingly precious the loving kindness of the Lord, when the devout and believing mind is enabled to say,—"This is the finger of God! This is a surprise of my Father's love! 'Or ever I was aware,' from a source and in a way which I could never have conceived, my God has come to my relief!"

"Ill-tidings never can surprise
His heart, that fixed on God relies,
Though waves and tempests roar around;
Safe on the Rock he sits, and sees
The shipwreck of his enemies,
And all their hope and glory drowned."

And now what are those "chariots" which seem to form an essential part of these gracious surprisals, these opportune deliverances, of which the saints are often the favoured subjects? "*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.*" These "chariots" constitute a remarkable symbol in the Christian's experience. They are figurative of the *means* by which the soul is brought near to God, and God near to the soul.

For example, PRAYER is one of the most essential

and costly "chariots" of the believer. It advances the soul in grace; it elevates, and brings us near to God. When has the Christian not use for this Divine chariot? The Apostle speaks of our coming to the mercy seat "in every time of need." When, in our experience, is it *not* a time of need? Suffer me, then, to remind you how close and accessible is the chariot of prayer. There are moments when your mind is perplexed with anxious thought,—when your spirit is bowed with deep-seated grief,—when your heart is filled with forebodings of coming trouble, domestic care, professional anxiety, commercial embarrassment,—or, the more spiritual exercises of the soul seem to prostrate you in the dust. Behold, *the chariot of prayer* at your side! It waits to bring you near to God. Arise, and give yourself to prayer, so shall you soar above all external circumstance, into a region whose brightness shall be unshaded, and whose serenity shall be unruffled by a single vapour, earth-born sorrow, anxiety, or trouble. Hesitate not to get into this "chariot." Deem not your trouble too great, or you yourself too unworthy. Nothing is too hard for God; with Him all things are possible. Giving yourself to prayer in the name of Jesus—pleading, not your righteousness, but His—not your merits and deservings, but the Saviour's worth and worthiness—you may, with a firm and bold foot, step into this Divine chariot, and in a moment it will lift you into the presence of God.

FAITH is a marvellous "chariot" of the soul, by which it mounts heavenward. The blessings flowing from simple faith in God are many and precious. "*If ye* BELIEVE, *ye shall eat of the fruit of the land.*" "*I had fainted, unless I had* BELIEVED, *to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*" Faith has a wondrous power to uplift the soul, "couching down," like Issachar, "between two burdens"—the burden of dark providence, and the burden of sinful unbelief. "*Have faith in God.*" Use this "chariot" provided by Christ Himself, for all our burdens. Here is the grand secret of being delivered from the pressure of a heavy heart: "*They looked unto Him, and were lightened.*" Cruel unbelief that dishonours God, and robs us! Wicked doubt that makes God a liar, and us atheists! But "precious faith," under sin's conviction, looks to Jesus and is saved: trusts God's veracity, power, and love, and so brings comfort to the soul, and glory to God. "*Abraham was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*" O be often in this "chariot." "Or ever you are aware," it will raise you above the loftiest mountain of difficulty and the darkest cloud of woe. It will anchor the soul—tempest-tossed as from billow to billow of doubt and fear—upon God's faithfulness, and the changeless love of Jesus—keeping it in perfect peace, stayed upon God.

LOVE is one of the choicest chariots of the Christian. "*The love of Christ constraineth us;*" *i.e.*, impels us,

presses us on, bears us forward and upward, by its irresistible and all-commanding influence. Love to Christ is the great exciting motive in the obedience, labour, and suffering of the believer. When love is in the ascendant, the wheels of obedience will run freely, the Cross will be sweet, and self-denial pleasant. It will sweetly soothe the soul in suffering,—not by the removal of all sense of pain, but by overcovering it with a sense of love. It will so robe the darkest providenee, that you shall see nothing but itself—nothing but love. How kind, then, and condescending of our Lord, to send this lovely chariot, when we need so much the Divine power of a heavenly affection to overcome our slothfulness, expel our selfishness, raise us to loftiness of thought, and to incite us to noble deeds for man, for God, and for Christ. Celestial are the flights that the believing soul takes in the chariot of love. Heaven and earth seem to embrace each other. Heaven is love—the source and home of love. And when the love of God makes its advent to the soul, it assimilates it to heaven by assimilating it with love. Thus when the Holy Spirit brings down this Divine affection, and makes a place for it in our sin-loving, creature-idolizing, earth-clinging hearts, we are conscious of the rapture of love, and ere we are aware, our soul makes us like the chariot of Ammi-nadib.

MEDITATION is a powerful promoter of this gracious and heavenly experience of the believing soul. "*While I*

was musing the fire burned." Thus, while I was retracing all the way the Lord had led me,—while I was meditating upon the fulness and preciousness of His Word—and while I was musing upon the great love wherewith He had loved me, the fire in my soul was enkindled; my lips were unsealed, and I spake with my tongue. There are few more powerful aids to growth in grace, to progress in sanctification of heart, and humbleness of mind, than devout meditation. Once in this chariot, and ere we are aware, we are caught up as to the third heaven, and lose ourselves in God. "*Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide.*" "*I meditate on Thee in the night-watches.*" Cultivate, my reader, this holy and useful habit. In a world of incessant action, and in an age of restless excitement, we have great need to imitate these holy examples, and to retire to the "calm retreat, the silent shade," and there abandon ourselves to devout meditation upon Divine, heavenly, and eternal things.

But we wait the solemn approach of the *last* chariot, and the final surprise,—our departure out of this life to go unto the Father. The Lord will, ere long, send for us *the chariot of death*, and it may be in a place and at a time that will fill the soul with solemn and sweet surprise. This chariot, like Solomon's royal equipage, is "paved with love." There is nought but love in the departure of the Lord's people. "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*" In love

He takes them from us: in love He translates them to Himself: and in love to them He translates them to the eternal home of love, into which He most lovingly welcomes them,—taken from the evil that now is, and from the evil that is to come. Often does this heaven-descending chariot appear at a time when the saints are not looking for it, and at an hour when they are not aware. It, perhaps, finds him with harness and armour on, with active brain, and willing hands, and loving heart, all engaged in the Master's work: when lo! or ever he is aware, his soul is made like the chariot of Ammi-nadib. O, the wondering surprise! O, the overpowering amazement! O, the unspeakable joy of the soul when it finds itself in heaven! It saw not death, suffered no pang, felt no fear, experienced no dread, was not conscious even of dying; but, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, was in glory,—mingling with the "glorious company of the Apostles," with the "noble army of martyrs," with an innumerable company of angels, and with "the spirits of just men made perfect." "*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me as the chariot of Ammi-nadib.*"

My dear unconverted reader, see that the chariot of death does not overtake *you* unawares, in other words, *unprepared.* I was on one occasion summoned to the dying bed of a gentleman whose early life had been absorbed in the accumulation of wealth, and his later life in its selfish and worldly enjoyment. The attack

was sudden, and the illness fatal. No skill could arrest the disease, no wealth could bribe the stern messenger. "Sir," said he, as he fastened upon me his dying gaze, "I am taken *by surprise!*" Alas, he had lived in the neglect of the great salvation: he had sought to gain the world, and when summoned to leave it for ever, found to his overwhelming astonishment and alarm, that in so doing he had *lost his own soul!* O, see that death does not surprise you, in finding you unprepared to obey its stern, inexorable summons.

Your only preparation is, as a penitent, believing sinner, in receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Place your soul in the hands of Jesus, and it is safe. Make its salvation, its safety for eternity, the first and chief object—all else is as unsubstantial and fleeting as a dream.

BEGINNING THE YEAR WITH JESUS.

EXODUS xii. 1—7.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, in the land of Egypt, saying,

"This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

"Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:

"And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.

"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats;

"And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

"And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it."

GOD has ever been wont to express his estimate of certain events in history and epochs in time. He would mark their importance, and perpetuate their memory by appointing standing memorials, which should in after ages testify to His righteousness, faith-

fulness, and love in the government of His Church. The institution of the Passover, and the time selected for its observance, illustrate this thought. There was, probably, no Jewish rite more strikingly typical of Christ, more impressively suggestive of Gospel truth than this. Whether we consider the occasion of its appointment,—the deliverance of the Israelites from the destroying angel; or the nature of the institution itself—a lamb slain, without blemish; or, the sprinkling of the blood upon the dwellings of God's chosen people,—all point to the great truth—"Christ our Passover:" or, "Christ our Pascal Lamb," as the original expresses it—"was sacrificed for us."

The *time*, too, of its appointment was scarcely less significant. The Israelites were to *begin the year* with its observance. They were to enter upon the first month of the year with sacrifice—the sacrifice of the pascal lamb. "*And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: and ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the con-*

gregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it." All this was typical of Jesus: all was replete with Gospel truth. But it is more especially with one view of the type our present reading relates, —the *period* when the pascal lamb was to be offered: it was "the first month of the year."

We are now entering upon a similar period of time. This is the beginning of months, the first month of the year to us. How are we to commence it? With what sentiments, feelings, and service shall we embark in its yet un-shaped history? Guided by the typical teaching of the institution we have just referred to, we are to commence this new year *with sacrifice:* to begin it with atoning blood; in other words, speaking in Gospel language,—*to make the cross of Jesus the starting point in the new journey of life.* The reasonableness of this will at once appear to the spiritual and reflective mind. If we would not ingraft upon the new year the sad memories of the old: if we are desirous not to import into its yet unstained, because its yet unborn time, the sins and guilt, the backslidings and failures, the habits and doings of the past, we must offer a *sacrifice:* we must present in faith a lamb: we must observe the sprinkling of blood. All this we have in "Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us."

The first thought which the opening of the year

naturally suggests to a reflective mind, relates to *individual conversion.* It is quite possible that many into whose hands this work may fall, are about to enter upon a new epoch of time still in a condition of spiritual unregeneracy. You are about to take into the new year the same unrenewed nature to which must be traced the countless sins, short-comings, and infirmities of the old. What a solemn, yea, what an appalling thought is this! You are entering upon a year in which everything in its history will be *new.* What! are you resolved to wed the old nature, the old sins, the old habits, with the new stage of your being? Shall this year be even as all the past have been —blanks in your life?—worse than blanks! There are, properly speaking, *no blanks* in human life. The page of each day's life is being inscribed with a history that will confront us in the last great day, and which will be read out before an assembled universe. There are no blanks! This is a probationary state, and every event, and action, and word of the present is solemnly and indissolubly linked with our future. What a man soweth in this probationary state of his being, that shall he also reap. Let your first consideration, then, be, on entering upon a new stage of life—your *new birth,* your true, spiritual conversion to God. Prostrate yourself in prayer, and beseech Him that this may be the year of jubilee to your soul—the year of your release from the thraldom of sin, the tyranny of the world,

the despotism of Satan, and the yet more enslaving power of your self-righteousness. Thus introduced into the liberty of the children of God, the freedom wherewith Christ makes His people free, it will be to you not only the beginning of months, but of a new and heavenly life, the beginning of an immortality of ever-growing bliss, and of ever-deepening glory. Thus earnestly do I plead with you, while yet standing amid the twilight shadows of the dawning year, to exclaim,—"What have I to do any more with idols? Henceforth, the Lord Jesus Christ shall be enthroned upon my heart, the Sovereign of every faculty, power, and affection of my being. Henceforth I am the Lord's." Thus taught by the Spirit, your sinfulness and need of Christ; thus led to trust only in Jesus; drawing from Him the inspiration of a new-born and heavenly life, and by His grace henceforth living upon Christ and for Christ, all things will become new. *This* is conversion—the conversion which the Word of God teaches, which the Holy Spirit imparts, and which heaven demands as an essential condition of its endless glory. Oh, hesitate to take another step in this new stage of life, ere you seek in earnest prayer to be a partaker of spiritual life. Begin not the year's duties, responsibilities, and temptations, but with Christ. It is for your life that I solemnly implore you to ask the Holy Spirit to regenerate you, that, henceforth, living the higher, nobler, and enduring life of a child of

God here, you may become an heir of glory, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven hereafter.

Another reflection suggested by the new year relates to our *progress in the Divine life.* Where is the child of God who desires that the past year of his Christian advance should be the model and the standard of the present? Who would ingraft upon the new year the spiritual coldness, torpor, and slothfulness, the infirmities, backslidings, and feeble advance of the old? No! the real believer, the true Christian pilgrim mournfully and sorrowfully lamenting the past,—his slow advance, his little real growth in grace, his innumerable frailties, infirmities, and short-comings, the coldness of his love to Christ, and the distance of his walk with God, —most earnestly desires that, with a new-born period of time he should commence a new start in the Divine life, a fresh surrender of himself to the Lord. If this be so, we must begin the year as the Israelites did—*with atoning blood.* In other words, we must make the cross of Jesus our starting point. There must be a renewed application of the blood, cleansing the past: and there must be the fresh sprinkling of the blood, consecrating the future. O import not into the new year the unrepented, uncleansed sins, the unhealed backslidings, and low spiritual standard of the old. Begin the year with all things *new.* One spiritual truth I am most solicitous in pressing upon the believer: it is, *the application* of atoning blood. This alone imparts assured

peace. What was it that gave to the Israelites the security, confidence, and composure which they felt when the angel of death sped through the land smiting the first-born of Egypt? It was the knowledge and consciousness of the blood of the pascal lamb *applied* to his dwelling! Apart from this he possessed no security and could have felt no peace. The grand failure in experimental religion of multitudes of Christian professors is, the want of an *applied* atonement. They are not *sure* that this blood is upon them: they have not fully come in faith to the blood. To them the words cannot wholly apply,—"Ye ARE come to the blood of sprinkling." Rest not short of this, my reader. The blood sprinkled by the Spirit and received by faith, will impart to your conscience present peace, by assuring you of a present security. Beneath that sprinkled, that personally applied blood, you can calmly repose, and triumphantly exclaim—"*There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.*" The blood on the conscience will purge it from the guilt of sin, and from dead works; the blood on the heart will fill it with *peace* in believing: yea, with *joy* unspeakable, and full of glory. Suffer nothing, then, to interpose itself between you and an *applied* atonement. Let no turpitude of guilt, no amount of sin, no aggravated backslidings, no abused privileges, no sense of personal unworthiness, no mournful memories, dare to interfere with your coming to the Saviour's blood of sprinkling.

If the blood of the pascal lamb, a type only, was to the Israelites a boon so precious, and conferred a blessing so vast, and was attended by results so hallowed, "*how much more* shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God!" sealing upon your heart "quietness and assurance for ever."

Thus commencing our year afresh, as from the cross, the next consideration that will engage our thoughts, will be,—our new start in the Christian life, a new and stronger impulse in personal and vital godliness. Every true child of God desires to be more holy, more gracious, more Christ-like, more heavenly, and so more matured for heaven. If there be one motto I would have more prominently and constantly before your eyes than another, throughout the year, it would be the Apostolic exhortation,—"GROW IN GRACE." Everything is advancing,—nature is advancing,—our state of probation is advancing,—prophetical events are advancing,—time is advancing,—shall the believer in Christ, the heir of God, the expectant of glory, be the only one stationary? God forbid! Surely if there is any creation of God possessing the element of advance, and destined to an unlimited growth and the highest culture, it is the Divine nature implanted in the believing soul. "*Speak unto the children of Israel, that they* GO FORWARD." Jehovah's

command is equally addressed to us. Forward, then, in a knowledge of Gospel truth; forward in a close assimilation to the Divine image; forward in personal holiness; forward in the service of Christ; forward in willing obedience and in patient suffering, and in matured meetness for glory; in a word, forward in every work of faith and labour of love for Jesus. We shall receive this new impulse by making the cross of redeeming, dying love, our starting point. We shall gird ourselves for another stage of life's duties, responsibilities, and trials, by a closer view of the purchase-price of our redemption, a more realizing sight of Him who gave Himself for us, the wondrous love that loved us, the unknown agony endured for us, the precious, priceless blood that ransomed us. O can we enter upon another—it may be our *last*—year of life, and not resolve that, by God's help, it shall be a year more fruitful of glory to His great and glorious Name? This year we will lay aside the weight that retarded the spiritual progress of the last; we will nail the daily besetting sin to the cross; we will lay down that which has been to us an impediment, and we will take up that which has been to us an irksome duty; and for Christ's sake, who gave Himself for us, that He might purify and appropriate us unto Himself a holy people, we will prayerfully, solemnly resolve that, henceforth, no creature and no created thing shall claim us; but that

for us to live, shall be simply, wholly, unalterably,—Christ.

Once more would I remark,—so vital and momentous is the subject,—what a new year, in its noblest significance, and what a happy year, in its highest sense, will this be, if it prove the year of grace to any upon whom it dawns in a state of *unregeneracy!* Who can tell what purposes of mercy, what thoughts of peace, God may have towards you? The still small voice of love may blend with the pensive winds which proclaim the advent of new time—"*The year of my redeemed is come.*" Emancipated, and enfranchised with the immunities and privileges of Christ's freed-men, it will be, in its fullest sense, the year of jubilee, in the history of your being. Earnestly do I plead with you humbly to invoke the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to resolve,—"From this day I am not the world's devotee, nor sin's servant, nor Satan's vassal, nor my own proprietor: "I AM THE LORD'S!" Thus taught by the Spirit your sinfulness, helplessness, and need of Christ; thus led from your own works and merits—which are nothing but filthy, loathsome rags—to trust in faith only in Christ, this year will be the commencement of a new and heavenly life. Oh, shall it be as the past of your life has been, and even yet more rebellious, more hardened in impenitence, and fortified in unbelief? Shudder to think such a condition

should be possible, or even probable. Terrible is the thought, appalling the prospect, that this newly added year of your existence, should but prepare you the more fully as fuel for the eternal fire,—"a vessel of wrath FITTED *to destruction.*" It is for your life, then, I entreat, I implore you, I beseech you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God. Lay down the weapons of your rebellion against God, and of hostility to His Son, and submit to the terms His Gospel requires, that, this year, you may live the higher, nobler life of an heir of glory.

For the Lord's own called people entering upon this new year, I would suggest both a *prayer* and a *promise.* The *prayer* is that of Moses,—"*If Thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence.*" What a needed and solemn petition! God's presence,—going with us! Such is the response of every true God-fearing, Christ-loving heart. The believer has learnt to understand the nature of God's favour, to know the value of His presence, to test the wisdom of His guidance, and to experience the blessedness of the light of His countenance. And now, the one desire and prayer of his heart is,—"Let Thy presence go with me. Let it accompany me in all the chequered, changeful history of this year. Let it counsel me in difficulty, soothe me in sickness, cheer me in solitude, keep me in danger, shield me in temptation, strengthen me in service, sustain me in suffering, and deliver

me from evil." Let, then, the accompanying presence of God be the intense desire of your heart, and the principal element of your Christian experience throughout the present, and every future year of your earthly pilgrimage. God's conscious comforting presence has been the experience and the solace of His people in all ages and in all circumstances. David felt it in the cave, Daniel in the lion's den, Jeremiah in the dungeon, Jonah in the whale's belly, Paul and Silas in the Philippian gaol, and John in the isle of Patmos. And why not you, O child beloved of God, in all the varied journeyings and trials and circumstances of your history?

Earnestly covet this blessing,—the sensible presence of God throughout what may prove an eventful year in your personal history. Realize that, whatever the varied incidents and afflictions in your experience may be, you are not alone, because your Father is with you. Live as in His continual atmosphere. Walk as before Him, and be perfect. His presence is promised, His help is pledged. "*Lo! I am with you alway.*" Aspire after the Psalmist's enviable experience,—"*I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*" Thus robed with God's conscious presence, your walk will be so regulated as to please Him in all things. You cannot voluntarily sin against Him, standing as encircled by the halo

of His Divine perfections. The place will be too awful, the atmosphere too pure, the feeling too solemn, for Satan or sin to dare intrude. It was when Peter lost sight of the person, and the felt-presence of Jesus, that he fell. Had he followed Christ closely, kept Him in view, sheltered beneath His side, and shared His ignominy, he had not fallen. What a warning for us! What a beacon light for those who professedly follow Christ! Our safety alone is in nearness to the cross,—is in walking in close communion with God, in the holy, filial, happy enjoyment of His encircling presence.

The *promise* is,—"*As thy days, so shall thy strength be.*" What an exceeding great and precious promise is this!

There are some promises of God which are intended to apply to *particular* circumstances in the Christian's history. They are special promises intended for some speciality in our experience. But here is a Divine promise intended for *all.* It seems to override and to include every other. "*As thy day*"—whatever the nature of the experience, or the demands of that day may be,—"*As thy days, so shall thy strength be.*" This great promise of God chimes with the equally Divine and precious promise of Christ on the eve of His ascension,—"*Lo I am with you alway* (Greek, *all days*), *even unto the end of the world.*" Grasping in faith these two Divine and beautiful staffs, let us enter upon a

new year strong in faith for another stage of life's solemn and eventful history. We may not reach the close of this year—*this year we may die!*—but let this be our comfort that, whatever may be its daily needs, its daily cares, its daily sins, its daily sorrows, God will be our strength and our salvation. He will not allow us to be our own spiritual purveyors: but will keep the supplies of strength and grace in His own hand: meeting them out just as our daily and hourly necessities demand. Such is the life of faith the Lord would have us live throughout this year; and so living, we shall best promote our own highest interests, and our heavenly Father's greatest glory. Beginning with the cross of Jesus on earth, we may end it with His throne of glory in heaven!

Cast thy burden on the Lord,
Only lean upon His word;
Thou wilt soon have cause to bless
His unchanging faithfulness.

He sustains thee by the hand,
He enables thee to stand;
Those whom Jesus once hath loved
From His grace are never moved.

Heaven and earth may pass away,
God's free grace shall not decay;
He hath promised to fulfil
All the pleasures of His will.

Jesus! Guardian of the flock,
Be Thyself our constant rock:
Make us by Thy powerful hand
Firm as Zion's mountain stand.

CHRIST'S
LAW OF CHRISTIAN BENEFICENCE.

MATTHEW X. 8.

"*Freely ye have received, freely give.*"

OUR Lord addressed these words to His disciples, on sending them forth as the appointed almoners of His own beneficence; as the chosen dispensers of the divine and precious blessings of His Gospel to all people. They were to consider themselves, not proprietors, but stewards; not as originating, but as dispensing the gifts and grace with which He, their Lord and Master, had furnished them. This will explain the special law which was to rule them in the exercise of their marvellous powers. They had received this treasure and these endowments at no cost to themselves, but simply and entirely as a gratuity,—as the *free gift* of God's favour. The law of their reception was to be the law of their dispersion. *Freely* they had received, *freely* they were to give. They were, by no means, to barter their gifts, to sell their favours, or in any way to make gain of godliness. They were not to be influenced in the exercise of their miraculous powers of

healing the sick, and of expelling demons from the possessed, or in their higher ministerial vocation of preaching the Word, by an avaricious spirit, by sordid motives,—labouring for filthy lucre's sake; but, as generously, as heartily, and as freely as they themselves had been dealt with by their Divine Master, so were they, His messengers, to deal with those to whom He sent them.

This law, however, had its wise and just exception. It was not to clash in any way with another law our Lord laid down on a similar occasion, in which He enjoined that, the "*labourer was worthy of his hire.*" Nor was this unfettered and spontaneous exercise of their powers to preclude them from receiving a competent support as the ministers of the Gospel, or as the stated pastors of the Churches. "*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*" (1 Cor. ix. 14.) "*If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*" But, as it regarded the sin of making merchandise of souls, the crime of bartering the costly wares they were Divinely commissioned freely to dispense, the law laid down by their Lord and Master was clear and imperative,—that, freely as they had received, as freely were they to give. The crime of "Simony," as in ecclesiastical law it is termed, originated in the case of Simon the sorcerer, who offered the Apostles money in exchange

for the miraculous gift of the Holy Ghost, and whom Peter thus sternly rebuked,—"*Thy money perish with thee: because thou hast thought the gift of God may be purchased with money, thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.*" In the control and negotiation of modern ecclesiastical affairs, of what moment is it that there should be not the slightest appearance of compromise with so dire a crime as that of making merchandise of godliness,—of selling and purchasing the "souls of men." (Rev. xviii. 13.)

But this law of Christ thus laid down for the regulation of the Apostles, is of equal application to us, as defining the rule which is to regulate our Christian beneficence. It stands closely connected with an important precept of practical religion, but seldom expounded, but little understood, and consequently, but imperfectly observed,—viz., *the precept of giving.* It is not our purpose, however, in the present limited space, fully to discuss this subject, but simply to suggest a few instructions tending to guide and stimulate the reader touching the obligation and the privilege of all the Lord's people of giving a portion of their worldly substance to the Lord. "*Freely ye have received, freely give.*"

The subject as presented in the text, is based upon two facts. The first is,—that we are all the *recipients* of certain blessings. "*Ye have received.*" This would

seem a self-evident proposition, requiring not a single proof or illustration; and yet, obvious as it is, we have need constantly to be reminded of it. For what, among countless blessings, are we more especially indebted to God? In the first place, we have received from Him our present *life*. "We thank Thee for our *creation*," should be our daily litany. Our life is a wondrous, responsible, and deathless thing. It is from God,—a pulse, a stream, a spark from the "Fountain" of His own being. God is the Author, as He is the Arbiter, of our life. From Him it came, by Him it is preserved, and at His fiat it returns to Him again. Thus life, with all its powers and sources of enjoyment —with its rainbow hues, its sparkling gems, its springing fountains, its murmuring music, its light and its song—is a divine thing, a sacred, beauteous thing, emanating from God, and is destined to return to God again; and if redeemed, renewed, and sanctified, to enjoy Him for ever. Many, alas, take their views of life, form their conception of its obligations, and their estimation of its worth, from the ten thousand ills which afflict and sadden, taint and degrade it: and then contemptuously inquire,—"Is *this* the life for whose creation I am daily to chant my litany?" In this they charge God with folly. Little do they think that God never made life as now they behold it. God created it holy,—man tainted it with sin. God made it teeming with beauty,—man marred

it by disobedience. God made it a reservoir, pure and sparkling,—man poisoned the fountain, and sent its baneful streams circling through the world. God made it bright and luminous,—man draped it with darkness and woe. Charge not God, then, with the sins and crimes, with the ills and sorrows with which life is laden and cursed: but thank and praise Him, that, notwithstanding all that fallen man has done to blast and ruin it, life is yet so bright, so beauteous, and so sweet a thing.

But some are the recipients of *spiritual life*. This is the higher, yea, the highest form of life,—life redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit. The moment a man begins to live for God,—the selfishness of His nature supplanted by love to his Creator, constraining him to devote his life to the glory of Him to whom by right of creation it belongs,—that moment he really begins to live, and enters upon the highest and noblest sphere of his being. My reader, until you are "born again," passing out of the old into the new birth, you cannot be said truly to live. It is *death* that lives in you, not *life!* "*Dead in trespasses and in sins*," your whole existence is but a prolonged and lingering death. O implore the Holy Spirit to quicken you with spiritual life, that henceforth you may live no longer to yourself, but to God. Ponder the remarkable and precious words of Christ,—"*I have come, that they might* HAVE LIFE." "*They that hear the voice of the*

Son of God SHALL LIVE." Christ is our life, and until we know Christ, we are dead. Let it, then, be the one aim and goal of your being—the one desire, prayer, and aspiration of your heart, until it is realised,—that Christ may be formed in you the hope of glory. Are we the happy recipients of spiritual life? Then, let us remember how great our indebtedness to sovereign love, and how solemn and imperious our obligation to devote its every pulse, its every thought, its every act to Christ.

As *intellectual* beings, we are distinguished recipients of God's mercy. God has conferred upon us *mind;* and he who, under God is instrumentally the teacher, the regenerator, the restorer, and the comforter of MIND, is the greatest benefactor of his race. To administer to a mind diseased,—to restore its balance, to dispel its delusions, to dislodge its ignorance, to raise its depression, and to shed around it the sunshine of gladness and of hope; above all, to lead it simply to Christ, and through Him up to God, is the noblest, holiest mission intrusted to mortal man. As an intellectual being, then, you must acknowledge yourself as having received a vast boon from God. He created, as He has preserved, your mind. The possession of intellect involves you in a great and solemn responsibility. God holds you accountable for its use. Beware how you employ it! If used to pervert the minds of others by the teaching of erroneous doctrines, by the propagation of a frivolous

or licentious literature, by the circulation of principles injurious to the morals of society, or perilling to the stability and happiness of the domestic constitution,—in a word, a literature that panders to vice and laughs at virtue, that fosters infidelity and superstition, while it ignores true religion and spiritual worship,—we say, if the intellectual powers God has conferred upon you, are thus employed and prostituted, your present responsibility and your final account are more tremendous and appalling than imagination can conceive or language describe. Who is sufficient to bear such a weight? Remember, oh *remember*, your Maker holds you accountable for your intellect! But still more precious this treasure, and yet more solemn our obligation, if by His regenerating grace, God has renewed us in the spirit of our mind. To what a noble sphere of intellectual being does the renewing of the Holy Ghost raise us! In its natural state, the human mind is made a little below the angels: but, in its renewed and restored state, it is raised to but one remove from the Divine. In the strong and emphatic language of the Apostle, all true believers are "*partakers of the Divine nature; created after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness.*" As such, what a powerful engine we possess for good! To be the author of a tract blest by the Spirit to the conversion of thousands; to compose a hymn that shall soothe many a sick and suffering couch; to speak a word about

Jesus that shall lift up a bowed or heal a wounded spirit; to explode a fatal error, to vindicate a Gospel truth,—O what a noble consecration this of renewed mind, of sanctified intellect!

And what *providential* blessings have we not received? Who can count their number? "*Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth me with benefits.*" Our HOME, with all its precious attractions, He provideth, —a roof to shelter us, a hearth to warm us, a couch to refresh us, food and raiment to sustain and clothe us, and all the domestic affection that graces and sweetens all. He gives us health to enjoy the benefits of His providence; blesses our industry, succeeds our enterprises, and fills our barns with plenty. He rebukes our diseases, sustains our trials, sooths our mental and bodly sufferings, and makes all our bed in sickness. He holds up our goings, shields our persons, and guards us with an eye that never slumbers by day, nor sleeps by night. Truly we "*have received.*"

But, turn we to the child of God, the believer in Jesus. If in this vast universe there is a being who has *received* of God, that *recipient* is he! God's gifts of nature are great: His gifts of providence are greater: but His gifts of grace are greatest. What have we as believers received? First, we have received the greatest of all gifts, the gift of God's dear Son. "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.*" "*To as many as received Him.*" "*Thanks be unto God for His*

unspeakable gift." Have you, my reader, received Christ Jesus the Lord? If so, you have received the greatest, the costliest, the most loved and lovely gift God could bestow upon you. Receiving this precious gift, you receive in it the Divine Giver. For Christ has said,—"*He that receiveth Me, receiveth Him that sent Me.*" Rich indeed are you who have received Christ into your heart, the Saviour of your soul, and the hope of your glory. In Him you have all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and all the infinite treasures of grace mediatorily. In Him you have a Divine Saviour, with a heart as *willing* as He has a hand *able* to save. In Him you possess a loving Brother, a faithful Friend, a sympathizing, wise, merciful, and ever interceeding High Priest within the veil. Oh prize highly your Divine treasure, make much of your precious gift. Let Jesus be all to you. Repair to Him for everything. Take to His blood all your guilt: confess beneath His cross all your sin: suspend upon His arm all your care: breathe upon His heart all your sorrow, and draw from His fulness all your supply. Oh that He may become increasingly precious to our hearts!

What more as believers have we received? We have received a free pardon,—a complete justification,—a gracious adoption,—a present salvation, and a hope of future glory,—even an "*inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*" We have received, too, a throne of grace to repair to in all

time of need; the Divine Word, with all its precious promises and rich instructions; the means of grace in all their richness; the communion of saints; and ten thousand streams all flowing from the heart of God, through Christ Jesus, and gliding along our every homeward path.

The second fact referred to, relates to the *principle* upon which we have received these blessings. "*Freely ye have received.*" Bankrupt of all worthiness, and having forfeited all claim,—without righteousness, without strength,—rebels against God's government, and outlaws of His kingdom,—there dwelleth in our flesh no good, but every evil thing. If ever these blessings become ours, it must be as a gratuity, and not as a purchase; as a gift, and not as a claim; freely, "without money and without price," irrespective of all works of merit, of all personal worthiness whatever on our part. And so it is. The declarations of the Gospel are as explicit on this matter as they are precious. Listen to them. "*By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*" "*Not of works, lest any man should boast.*" "*Who hath justified us* FREELY *by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" "*The* FREE *gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*" "*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*" And with the

same gracious declaration,—a free grace salvation,—the Bible closes,—"*And whosoever will, let him take the water of life* FREELY." Such are the gracious, unfettered, precious revelations of the Gospel of the grace of God: nothing more and nothing less. Soul! burdened with sin, oppressed with guilt, bankrupt of all righteousness and strength,—you have nothing to pay in return for God's full forgiveness of all your sins. "*And when they had nothing to pay, He frankly forgave them both.*" You *have* nothing to pay; and over the portal it is written,—"There is nothing to pay:" why then should you hesitate coming to Christ? There is but *one* applicant for His salvation whose suit He rejects: but *one* soul whom He sends empty away,—it is the sinner who, in the boldness and presumption of his proud, unhumbled heart, comes with a price in his hand, profanely and vainly imagining that the precious, priceless gift of God's forgiveness, of Christ's salvation, can be purchased with money. Accept, then, thou sin-convinced soul, the *free* pardon of your sins, and the *free* justification of your person, as the free gift of God's unmerited and unpurchasable grace, and you shall be saved.

We reach the application of this law to the subject of our present reading,—*Christian beneficence.* We have remarked that the subject of consecrating our worldly substance to the Lord, as a Divine precept of our holy religion, is but seldom brought before the

Christian Church with that distinct prominence, and enforced by those powerful motives, with which it is set forth in the Word of God. It is a part of practical religion much and sinfully overlooked. We do not assert that real religion consists in *giving:* far from this; but we do venture to affirm that, while there may be great liberality without true religion, there cannot be true religion without liberality. Giving of our worldly substance may not of itself be a religious act, but where vital religion has a place, the love of God a home, Christ and the Spirit a temple in the soul,—selfishness, parsimony, and covetousness, — in other words, a withholding from the Lord of our worldly substance,—cannot possibly co-exist in the same individual. A Christian man, recognizing himself as bought with a price, regards his earthly possessions as much the Lord's as his being. A money-loving, a money-hoarding, a money-withholding disciple of Jesus, are not synonymous terms. "*The covetous whom the Lord abhorreth,*" have no part or lot with Him who emptied Himself of His glory and for our sakes became poor. Let us trace a few of the *characteristics* of Christian liberality, and thus test our observance of this precept.

In the first place, *it is of Divine authority.* It is a command of God: a precept of Christ: a revealed principle of our holy faith. It was God's command to His people of old, that a tenth of their herds should be holy unto Him. And when building and furnishing

the temple, God enjoined the people of Israel to bring freely and abundantly of their offerings—their gold and silver and wood, to rear the sacred edifice, and their beaten oil wherewith to keep its lamps perpetually burning. How reasonable the *precept*,—"*Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase;*" and how God-like the *promise*,—"*so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst forth with new wine.*" Who has ever honoured the Lord in the observance of this precept, whom the Lord has not honoured in the fulfilment of the promise?

Christian beneficence also recognises the truth that, it is *the Lord's* which we give to Him, and not our own. We are recipients and not originators, stewards and not owners of our earthly possessions. The principle is this, —"*All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.*" (1 Chron. xxix. 14.) In devoting, then, any portion of our worldly goods to the Lord, we are to remember that we are not thereby making God our debtor, placing Him under an obligation to ourselves; we are but laying at His feet what already He has poured into our cup, and is His by original right, by free bestowment, and by temporary loan. And as we cast our offerings into the treasury, justice and humility extort the exclamation,—"*All this store cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own.*" Remember this, thou disciple of Jesus! God asks, yea, demands

at thy hands but that which already belongs to Him. It is He that has prospered your plans, has blessed your industry, and has enriched you with wealth; and, in giving to the Lord you give nothing which He has not loaned to you. "OF THINE OWN HAVE WE GIVEN THEE."

Our liberality is to be *graduated by our possessions.* The Divine rule is,—"*Thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee. Every man shall give as he is able.*" (Deut. xvi. 10, 17.) How wise and equitable this law of Christian beneficence! God does not require of us to give beyond, but commensurate with, our ability. See you well to this. Are you giving to the cause of God in proportion to God's gifts to you? Are your contributions to aid the kingdom of the Saviour in the world, on a scale with your worldly possessions and your income? Are you in this sense a faithful steward of your Lord's goods? Remember, the Master has said,—"*Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*" (Luke xii. 48.)

Our beneficence is to be *willing* and not begrudged, *cheerful* and not reluctant. "*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering: of every man that giveth it* WILLINGLY *with his heart ye shall take My offering.*" (EX. XXV. 1, 2.) The same rule is to govern the servants of Christ. "*Every man according as he pur-*

poseth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a CHEERFUL *giver.*" (2 Cor. ix. 7.) The love of Christ constraining us, this will be the spirit actuating our liberality. It will not be wrung from us by constraint or by argument, neither will it be exercised under the influence of impulse or excitement,—it will be the spontaneous, free-will offering of the heart, and exercised upon the principle of obligation and love. It is not at the costliness of the gift God looks, but the *heart* which prompts it. "*For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*"

Our giving should be, as far as possible, *systematic.* "*Upon the first day of the month, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.*" (1 Cor. xvi. 2.) Such is the Apostolic injunction. When this plan can be conveniently adopted, it will be found the most simple and successful. Those who are in the receipt of daily or weekly returns, have it in their power to adopt this systematic mode of contribution, which in the end will be found in all respects the best. They will be surprised to discover how this small tax upon their daily earnings, this weekly setting apart of a portion of their income for the Lord, has gradually accumulated to an amount as astonishing and gratifying to themselves, as helpful to the cause of Christ and pleasing to the Lord. This plan of

systematic giving enters essentially into home-religion. Cultivated by each member of the household, from the master down to the humblest domestic, it will be found to aid marvellously the economy and happiness of the home-circle, and in the end to contribute richly towards the claims and calls of Christian beneficence.

Our liberality should *be prompt.* A slow, tardy benevolence, postponed to a more convenient season, often fails of its object. There are occasions when the necessity of a Christian brother, or the cause of truth, or the kingdom of Christ and the glory of God, demand a prompt and immediate, as well as a generous and unconstrained, response and action. Promptness in giving frequently enhances the value of the gift. It is a significant aphorism,—"*Bis dat qui cito dat;*" "He gives *double* who gives *promptly.*" A seasonable liberality, a timely aid, a helping hand just at the crisis, may often be of tenfold more worth to a society, an enterprise, or an individual, than if bestowed at a later period, and with a more profuse hand.

But little space in the present reading is left for a consideration of the *blessings* connected with giving. "*Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.*" We read again,—"*He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord;*" and of this we are assured, none shall lend to the Lord and not receive an ample return, full measure and running over will the Lord give to him. Remember the words

of the Lord Jesus, when He said,—"*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" And again,—"GIVE, *and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.*"[a] And those of the Apostle,—"*Let us do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith.*"[b] How noble the character and how encouraging the promise,—"*The liberal soul deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand.*"

In conclusion, let us seek grace, that we may walk in this Christian precept of liberality with all faithfulness and simplicity; giving, not as to man, but as to the Lord. The responsibility of *wealth* is tremendous. *Money* is a talent. We must give an account to God of the manner in which we have employed it. Be not ambitious of *dying* rich. "*How hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven!*" Hesitate not to lay down at Christ's feet of your substance, retaining only that which is absolutely necessary to enable you to walk honestly and uprightly before men. "FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE."

"With my substance I will honour
My Redeemer and my Lord;
Were ten thousand worlds my manor,
All were nothing to His Word:
While the heralds of salvation
His abounding grace proclaim,
Let His friends of every station
Gladly join to spread His fame."

[a] Luke vi. 38. [b] Gal. vi. 10.

SPIRITUAL DILIGENCE.

PROVERBS xiii. 4.

"The diligent soul shall be made fat."

THE professing Christian who is not painfully conscious of a strong tendency to spiritual sluggishness, is but imperfectly conversant with the sinfulness of his own heart, and knows but little of the subtle workings of his own mind. Not more certain is the setting of the sun at even, or the going down of a time-piece the moment it is wound up, than is the tendency of the renewed nature, from its highest point of experience, to spiritual declension and relapse. "ON MY BED *I sought him whom my soul loveth. I* SLEEP, *but my heart waketh,*" was the humiliating confession of the Church of old; and in numberless cases, were they honest to themselves, would be the confession of many Christians now. Not thus is it with the men of this world: here, for the most part, are no signs of sluggishness. In their toil for gain, in their struggle for honour, in their chase of pleasure, they are seldom found reposing upon the bed of sloth. Rising early, and sitting up

late, they eat the bread of carefulness. Enlisting every faculty, employing every means, and straining every nerve,—*one* thing they do, and that one thing they attain. And although, when they reach the goal and grasp the prize, they find it but a shadow, a phantom, a dream; nevertheless, staking their life for "a corruptible crown," they win it, and so they *have* their reward. But how different with us, the professed disciples of Christ, the children of God, and heirs of glory! How languidly we run the race, how feebly we struggle with the foe, how slow to lay hold on eternal life.

The passage which suggests our present reading, places before us two characters in striking contrast: the "sluggard" desiring and having nothing; the "diligent, and his soul made fat." The points of contrast are many and striking. The "sluggard" has his religious "desires," and nothing more. He would fain be saved, but makes no effort to get salvation. He would be religious, without real religion; pious, without true piety; claiming the fruit of godliness apart from the root of godliness; looking for the reward of labour, without the labour that secures the reward; expecting the conquest of sinful habits without the battle that ensures the victory: in a word, looking for heaven without taking one real step heavenward. Is this rational?—is it sane? Ask him to apply the same rule to his worldly affairs,—in his race for wealth,—in his chase for honour,—in his pursuit of pleasure,—and he would laugh you to scorn.

Alas! that in the all-momentous matter of the soul's salvation, the religion of multitudes should consist in nothing more than mere *desire*,—which means, and ends in, *nothing*. My dear reader, does this apply to you? Then let me, in all faithfulness, endeavour to dispel your delusion. An old divine remarks that, the path to hell is paved with good desires. Satan has not a more flattering, or a yet more fatal mode of smoothing the soul's pathway to the nethermost hell than this. If he can but foster in you these dead, meaningless desires after salvation, until your conscience becomes so torpid, and your heart so languid, and your soul so indifferent, that even these desires at last fail, he well knows he has secured his victim. But if ever you become truly religious, if ever you are really saved, it must be by a desire more vital, by a struggle more severe, by an influence more spiritual and divine than that which now moves you. Oh! it is of the utmost importance that you are sincere, and earnest, and persevering in the all-momentous matter of the soul's eternal well-being. It admits of no sluggish effort, it will be obtained by no languid desires, it will be secured by no faint, heartless competition for the prize. Let the solemn, earnest words of Jesus ring in your ears until they awaken a response in your soul: "STRIVE *to enter in at the strait gate.*" If in anything you must be down-right earnest, it is the salvation of your soul. All other considerations are,

in comparison with this, but as shadows upon the wall, as the foam upon the billow. Eternal life or eternal death,—endless bliss or endless woe,—heaven or hell, are suspended upon the issue. Oh! remember it is written by the pen of Inspiration that, "*the sluggard desireth and hath nothing.*"—NOTHING! But let us turn our attention to the "diligent soul,"—"*The soul of the diligent shall be made fat.*" What are some of the *characteristics* of the spiritually diligent? Let us group them.

The diligent soul is a *converted* soul. The words are descriptive of a gracious state. The truly diligent believer is a partaker of spiritual life; to speak more emphatically, he is a *living soul;* or, in language yet more expressive, Christ liveth in him: so that it is not so much he that lives as that Christ lives in him. The "diligent soul" is a *sin-pardoned* soul. All his sins are washed away by the blood of Christ, God, for Christ's sake, having forgiven him all iniquity. He is equally *justified.* Forgiveness and justification go hand in hand. By grace the pardoned soul is accepted of God in His beloved Son. He thus stands before God, through imputed righteousness, freely, fully, justified from all things. *Sanctification,* or progressive holiness, is another characteristic. A partaker of the divine nature, the diligent soul aims after the divine image, hungers and thirsts after holiness, and experiences its highest happines in doing and suffering

the will of God from the heart. *Love* to the Saviour is an essential attribute of the spiritually diligent. The absence of love would involve the absence of the great motive power of religious diligence. Love is the grand moving principle of God in redemption. "*God so loved,*" is the key-note of the wondrous announcement. And love to God unfolds the great secret of all earnest, holy obedience and diligence in the great matter of the soul's spiritual and eternal well-being. But let me now, having thus briefly portrayed the character of the diligent soul, specify some of those things in which spiritual, earnest diligence is demanded.

The first is, *to make quite sure of our personal salvation.* This is a matter too vital and momentous to admit of a careless, languid, or postponed consideration. It is the only moral problem in a man's life which demands incessant study and accurate solution. The proof must be demonstration itself. It is a fact the truth of which cannot be assumed. It is a matter which cannot be taken for granted. It is a question which, speaking after the manner of the logicians, we cannot "beg." It must be Scripturally proved, divinely authenticated, and internally witnessed. Listen to the strong language of the Apostle Peter, addressed to the saints of God,—"*Wherefore the rather brethren, give* DILIGENCE *to make your* CALLING *and* ELECTION *sure.*"[a] The transposition of the Apostle in these

[a] Peter i. 10.

words is worthy of remark. It will be observed that although "election" is the antecedent act, he mentions "calling" first. There is much wisdom and skill, as well as tenderness and love in this. He would teach us that, in this great matter of working out our salvation, we must begin with "*calling*," since it is God's part to begin with "*election*." With "election" we have nothing to do but simply to believe and holily to live it, since it is one of those "*secret things which belong unto God*." It is the *first link* in the chain of our salvation, and is fastened to the eternal throne of the everlasting God. But the link in the chain with which we, as sinners, are more especially concerned, is the lowest one of all,—that of our "*calling*." If we once get firm hold of this link, the question of our election is settled. We are to give all diligence to make our *calling* sure, and this in its turn makes sure to us the fact of our *election*. Thus with what confidence the Apostle addresses the Thessalonian saints, —"*knowing, brethren beloved, your* ELECTION *of God*." How did he arrive at a knowledge of their election of God? By what evidence was the fact confirmed? He himself answers, "*For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*." Thus, it was by their effectual calling of the Spirit that he knew their eternal election of God. By the same simple process we are to arrive at the same happy conclusion. Like the Apostle, we

must reason, not from election to calling, but from calling to election. We must take hold by faith of the lowest link and so rise to the highest. Use all diligence, then, to make your *calling sure.* Let it not be a questionable, doubtful matter whether or not you have heard the call of the Spirit in your soul. All God's people, sooner or later, are a called people. "*Whom He did predestinate, them He also* CALLED." What says the Apostle, referring to himself? "*and* CALLED *me by His grace.*" Have you then been called? Have you heard the voice of Jesus calling you from the world, from your sins, from your idols, from your own righteousness to Himself? "*My sheep hear my voice.*" Have *you* heard it? It is a sweet, winning voice, unmistakable in its accents, melodious in its tone, and irresistible in its power to them that hear it. It whispers in love now—it will thunder in judgment ere long. It now invites the weary, the burdened, the sorrowful to the repose of His loving, gracious heart; by and by it will be the voice of the Archangel sounding the trump of God, saying to the ungodly, "depart!" Have you, I again ask, heard the call of Jesus? Has His Gospel come to you, not in word only, but with the quickening, converting power of the Holy Ghost? If it is still a doubtful matter, if you are not *quite sure* that you are converted give all diligence to be so. Rest not until you have got, as the old Scotch divines were wont to express the thought, "*a grip* of Christ."

Get hold of Him by faith, and you may rest assured as to your calling; and if called of God, you may be equally sure as to your election of God.

Election is a most unmerited and glorious act of God's love and grace; and when it occupies in our experimental religion its proper place, it is one of the most encouraging, comforting, and sanctifying truths of the Gospel. But if you are just setting out in the divine life; if you are seeking the Lord, feeling after the Saviour, let the subject of your election remain in abeyance for a while, until you have first given all diligence to make your CALLING sure. You will then find God's electing love sweet and holy nourishment to your soul.

Our *growth in grace* also demands all diligence. The soul's progress in holiness is not promoted by languor and neglect. It must not be left to its own spontaneity. The soil in which the holy seed is sown, the garden in which the divine plants are reared by God, is too hostile to the culture of holiness to admit of their growth apart from the strictest diligence and incessant watchfulness on the part of the believer. There must be much self-communion—holy vigilance—close walking with God—and the diligent use of all the appointed means of grace. It is thus the Apostle Peter exhorts us to this: "*Giving* ALL DILIGENCE, *add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience*

godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."[b] What a lesson in sacred arithmetic for the saints of God to learn,—the holy lesson of *increasing* their grace, and *adding* to the graces of their Christian character. This sacred lesson is only learnt by giving to its study all diligence. It is, too, the lesson of daily life and of our whole life. Each day should find us growing in an acquaintance with Christ; augmenting our stock of grace; strengthening the graces of our Christian character; and "*increasing in the knowledge of God.*"

Nor is this diligence to terminate but with the termination of our Christian course. "*We desire,*" says the Apostle, "*that every one of you do show the same* DILIGENCE *to the full assurance of hope* UNTO THE END." The necessity of watchfulness, earnestness, and perseverance in the things relating to our eternal future will exist until that future is reached. The race we run, admits of no pause; the pilgrimage we travel, of no halting; the battle we fight, of no truce; the prize for which we compete, of no compromise. There is an *end* before us, and that end we must keep full in view. The Saviour has said,—"*He that endureth* TO THE END *shall be saved.*"[c] "*Be thou faithful* UNTO DEATH, *and*

[b] 2 Peter i. 5—8. [c] Matt. x. 22.

I will give thee a crown of life that fadeth not away." The garden of the believing soul will soon betray the diligent care and skill of its culture. "*I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.*"[d] But to those who keep diligently their own spiritual vineyard, seeking to walk in all godly obedience, the promise is,—"*The* LORD *shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of waters whose waters fail not.*"[e] O who would not give all diligence to work out a salvation—which God by His Spirit has wrought in us—with fear and trembling, knowing that such blessings as these are held out as its reward?

We can only further remark, in general terms that, spiritual earnestness and activity involve *diligence in prayer:* the *praying* soul will ever be a *diligent* soul. Prayer preserves religion alive in the soul; draws in the vital influence that keeps it healthful and vigorous. And if we would forego the couch of ease and the bed of slumber, we must keep the heart with all prayerful diligence in close intercourse with God. If, too, the soul would become fat and flourishing, there must be all holy diligence in the employment of those

[d] Prov. xxiv. 30, 31. [e] Isaiah lviii. 11.

means and appliances God has appointed for our use. "*Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors.*" We can expect nought but leanness of soul if we are found sinfully undervaluing and wilfully neglecting God's appointed ordinances and means. When a religious professor imagines that he has got above the means —that he has reached so advanced and elevated a point in his Christianity as to be independent of a teaching ministry, of sanctuary worship, of the ordinances of Christ's Church, of social Christian fellowship, of closet prayer, and of the communion of saints —it is time that he should look with holy jealousy and alarm to the real state of his soul as before God. That man is deceived. *He* is not that diligent soul whose grace is vigorous, and whose graces are radiant. He is not fighting manfully, nor violent in prayer, nor trading diligently with heaven, nor so employing his Master's talents as to bring to Him the largest revenue of glory. *His* soul shall be lean, while the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

We must give all diligence, too, that God's afflictive dealings with us may be sanctified. There is scarcely any path in our Christian course which so loudly calls for diligence as this. The *loss* of an affliction, of a trial, of a temptation, is an irrevocable loss. It cannot be repaired. There was a *needs-be* for the rod of correction with which our Heavenly Father

visited us,—some sin to be removed, or some backsliding to be restored, or some evil to be checked, or some lesson to be learnt, or some blessing to be bestowed. If, then, we are not diligent in seeking a sanctified possession of the discipline, earnest in securing the end for which our God chastened us, we have lost the mission and the blessing for which it was sent,—and O how great and irreparable that loss!

Let us, then, see that we lose not one of our sorrows—they are too precious and valuable to be lost—but that we turn them all to a good account; diligent to extract some sweet thing from the bitter, some nourishing thing from the eater, and to find a pencilling of light in the somberest cloud. Let us see that under the afflictive hand of God we become more humble, more spiritually minded, more dead to the world, more prayerful, more Christ-like, and Christ more precious;—in a word, made by our Father's corrections more "*a partaker of the Divine holiness.*" O hallowed fruit of sanctified sorrow? Earthly sorrow is, too, a preparation for heavenly joy. All the saints in glory graduated from this school; and many with high honour—honour to themselves and honour and glory to our God. No tongue can adequately describe the costly, sacred blessings flowing from one hallowed sorrow. We have, perhaps, become more intimately acquainted with the character of God, more experimentally know the Lord Jesus Christ, and more spiritually understand the

meaning of God's holy Word, in *one* sanctified affliction, than we ever attained to in all our previous history. "*Blessed is the man whom Thou* CHASTENETH, *O Lord, and* TEACHETH *him out of Thy law.*" Trial makes us apt scholars,—skilful interpreters of the Scriptures. "I never understood the Psalms," says Luther, "until God *afflicted* me." Thus affliction performs a heaven-sent mission. It stirs us up to Christian diligence and wakefulness. Some of God's people are spiritual *somnambulists*,—they are apt to walk the heavenly way in their sleep! "*I sleep, but my heart waketh.*" In consequence of this infirmity they are exposed to great danger. If Israel's Keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps, did not hold them up, a single step in this their drowsy, dreamy state, would prove for ever fatal. But God wisely and lovingly provides for this moral somnambulism of His saints. By the rod of affliction, sometimes very gentle, at other times very heavy, He wakes them from their slumbers, rouses them to a sense of their peril, and stirs them up to more diligent, earnest, prayerful waiting upon Him. And then they testify,—"*Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy Word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes.*" This subject is a most practical one.

Let us, as believers, watch against sleepy frames. "*Drowsiness covereth a man with rags:*" it robs and

impoverishes him. Spiritual drowsiness will be followed with like spiritual effects in our souls. We shall forget how glorious is our clothing in the righteousness of Christ, how comely are our persons before God, viewed in Jesus, and consequently we shall not realize our present acceptance in the Son of God; we shall lose the enjoyment of the blessing which flows from the blessed state described by the Apostle:—"*Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" There is no position or place in which there is not need to watch against spiritual sluggishness and lethargy. The disciples fell fast asleep on the mount of transfiguration, and in the garden of Gethsemane! Who of us, then, are safe? Some grow lean in the midst of plenty, while others are kept alive in famine. Rutherford quaintly but truly remarks,—"An empty stomach often keeps a man awake, while a full one lulls him to sleep." When God removes us from fat pasture, leads us into the desert, creates in us hungering and thirsting after the means of grace, after the banqueting house of His Gospel,—fills the soul with a sight of sin, with a sense of its deep need of Christ, and with earnest longings after Him,—O, what a powerful means has all this proved of keeping believing souls broad awake, watchful, prayerful, close to God!

Equally must we be on our guard against that which produces supineness and sleepiness of frame.

The *world* is a powerful soporific. Its moral effect is stupifying, deadening. Watch against it. Go not into it. You cannot drink of its cup of pleasure and not be spiritually drowsy. The world and Christ are the antipodes of each other; and it is impossible for you to carry Christ to heaven in one hand, and the gay, the frivolous, the Christ-despising world in the other. *Sin* in every shape is spiritually stupifying. It is a fearful narcotic to the soul of a man of God. Watch against its pleas and its disguises; its small departures which inevitably lead to great ones. Be careful of a too great absorption in your worldly calling. Let not business drown your soul. Be content with a limited measure of success, that you may find time for religious privileges and duties, public and private. Never suffer the interests of Christ's cause to give place to, or be slighted by, your own. Seek *first* the kingdom of God,—this will tend much to keep your soul alive. You will not be less "*diligent in business*," for being first "*fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*" Watch, then, against all these sleeping draughts. Remember Pharaoh's dream,—it is strikingly significant. "*The ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine.*"[t] All these things against which I have guarded you are the "*ill favoured and leanfleshed kine*," which will "*eat up*" the marrow and fatness of your soul, compelling you to exclaim, "*My*

[t] Gen. xli. 4.

leanness, my leanness, woe unto me." Be studiously, prayerfully watchful against the *world's religion.* It *looks* very religious, O truly!—but in reality it is all hollow, sinful, and fatal. The holiness of the world is false. Its religion is false. Its worship is false. Its hopes are false. Its professors are false. Be on your watch-tower against *Ritualism*,—it is fascinating, ensnaring, but soul-destroying. The sceptical religion and ritualistic worship of the day,—the religion and worship of vestments, of altar lights, of incense, of crosses, of sacraments, of genuflexions, of a ghostly priesthood—which is no priesthood at all—is *drugging* the souls of thousands, who, drinking of its fleshly, enticing cup, sink into a profounder sleep of spiritual death, from which, perhaps, they never wake until awakened by the groans and curses, the flames and torments of hell!

Perhaps the Lord is rousing you to spiritual sensibility, by causing you to *feel* how cold, and sleepy, and dormant your heart has too long been. And now, it may be, you feel as if you had no feeling! You are sensible only of insensibility! You are softened by the very consciousness of your hardness. You are alive only to the existence of death. The words of the Christian poet may best express your experience:—

"O yes! I'm sinful: that I know,
For God and conscience tell me so;
But yet, for all my sin and woe,
I cannot feel!

"I know the Truth: I'm deeply read;
And Bible doctrines fill my head:
But oh! my heart is cold and dead,—
I cannot feel!

"O could I feel enough oppressed,
Then Jesus Christ might give me rest:
But with a stone within my breast,
I cannot feel!

"If I could weep and mourn for sin,
Then my salvation would begin:
But what a harden'd state I'm in,—
I cannot feel!"

Do these lines express your spiritual experience? Then, thank God, and take courage! These thoughts, these words, these feelings are unmistakeable evidences of grace. They are not the marks of a dead, but the vital breathings of a *living soul*—a soul alive from Christ, and alive in Christ. As a corpse is not sensible of its insensibility, so an individual entirely "*dead in trespasses and sins*," would never weep and mourn for sin, and lament its want of feeling. The Lord comfort, encourage, and stimulate you with these words! If you have this true, real desire for Christ, His whole heart travels towards you.

Yes, the diligent soul shall have its reward,—"*it shall be made fat.*" Just as a man diligent in the business of this life prospers and becomes rich, so the spiritual merchantman, the soul trading with heaven

and heavenly things,—who, waiting on the Lord, constantly attending on the Word and ordinances of His house, labouring for the meat which endureth unto eternal life,—shall be fat and flourishing, shall be filled and satisfied as with marrow and fatness, shall become fruitful in every good word and work, a vessel of honour fit for the Master's use. Be watchful, be prayerful, be diligent. Christ is coming! the Lord is at hand! "*It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is your salvation nearer than when ye believed.*" Everything bids you *persevere.* The prize held out to you bids you—*persevere.* The glittering crown, the snowy robe, the waving palm, the golden harp, the new song, the vision of Jesus in His glory, all, *all* with one accord unite in saying to you—PERSEVERE! "*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things,* BE DILIGENT, *that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.*" Sweet thought, that Jesus, amid the drowsiness of His people, never sleeps. He watches over us by day, by night, moment by moment, with unwearied care and with unslumbering love. See how patiently, faithfully, lovingly, He stands at the door of thy cold and half dead heart.—"*Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled: for My head is filled with dew, My locks with the drops of the night.*" Does this look as if Jesus slumbers when we sleep, or as though He had withdrawn when we depart? Ah, no! Expressive attitude, touching

words, tender irresistible appeal! O that the response of our innermost heart may be,—"Come, Lord Jesus: come quickly! Enter and claim me for Thyself,—body, soul, and spirit." "WATCH YE, THEREFORE; FOR YE KNOW NOT WHEN THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE COMETH, AT EVEN, OR AT MIDNIGHT, OR AT THE COCK CROWING, OR IN THE MORNING; LEST COMING SUDDENLY HE FIND YOU SLEEPING."

"Wake, thou that sleepest in enchanted bowers,
Lest these lost years should haunt thee in the night
When death is waiting for thy numbered hours
To take their swift and everlasting flight:
Wake, 'ere the earth-born charm unnerve thee quite,
And be thy thoughts to work divine addressed;
Do *something*—do it soon—do it with all thy might!
An angel's wing would droop, if long at rest,
And God himself, inactive, were no longer blest."

FRAGMENTS GATHERED.

JOHN vi. 12.

"He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

IT is a marked and instructive feature of all God's works, that there is no *waste*,—no unmeaning expenditure, nothing extravagant or superfluous. All His operations, from the most minute to the most stupendous, are upon a principle of the strictest economy. There is not an atom of matter, nor a ray of light, nor a breath of air, nor a drop of water,—nor a living thing over and above what is absolutely needful. Not a tree or shrub, not a beauteous flower or noxious weed, not an insect or animal, not a breath of air or a wave of the sea, that has not a mission to accomplish, an end to answer. Munificence and economy are the prevailing laws of God's works. Every thing is vast, and nothing is lost.

Such is the principle recognised and enforced by our Lord in the words selected for our present reflection. Moved by human compassion, He had

just performed a Divine miracle. A great multitude, attracted by His marvellous power of healing, penetrated the desert whither He had retired, and found themselves cut off from all temporal supply. Inquiring of His disciples the extent of their resources, and finding them to consist of but five barley loaves and two small fishes, He resolved upon the exercise of His miraculous power to meet the case. Taking in His hands the loaves, and looking up to God, He break, and then gave to His disciples, who distributed to the multitude until their wants were fully met. Then followed the command inviting our attention,—"*When they were filled, He said unto His disciples*, GATHER UP THE FRAGMENTS THAT REMAIN, THAT NOTHING BE LOST." Such is the Divine precept of economy which we now propose to consider. The subject is highly spiritual, practical, and instructive. The great truth inculcated is that, as there is no waste in God's works, so there should be none in ours. That the fragments, whatever they are, in our domestic, personal, or official economy, should be conscientiously husbanded and carefully gathered, *that nothing be lost*. This principle applies to human society in all its departments, more thoroughly than would at first sight appear. It belongs to the ministry of home,—it is inseparable from the proper government of our various public societies,—it enters essentially into the prosperity of our different callings in life,—and it is yet more

closely and solemnly entwined with our Christian character and religious profession. "*Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.*" Returning to the narrative, let us attempt to glean from it the sacred truths which it teaches, and this will have prepared us to consider the Divine precept which it illustrates.

The first thing which the incident teaches is, the *miraculous* feeding of this vast multitude. It was in all respects a *Divine miracle.* The MIRACLES of the Bible have ever been regarded as constituting one of its most essential and impregnable fortresses. This will account, in a great measure, for the malignant assaults to which they have been subjected in every age of the world and by every phase of infidelity. Destroy the *miraculous* element of revelation, and its Divine authority is essentially shaken. Not that we would overrate the importance of miracles, as if the Bible relied for its evidence alone upon them. We regard the proofs drawn from the *prophecies* as equally demonstrable. It is the glory of our faith that its witnesses are many and true. That if one fails to rebut the assault and to convince the assailant, others appear upon the field equally as credible and conclusive. If one seal be ruthlessly torn from the sacred parchment, others remain to witness its truth and to attest its Divinity. The miracle was on this wise:—

Attracted by His healing power, the multitude fol-

lowed Jesus into Tiberias on foot, while He went by sea. Their route being shorter than His, He found them awaiting His arrival, to whom "*He spake of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.*" Seeing this great multitude hemmed in by the wilderness and with want staring them in the face, the question arose,—how was their hunger to be met? "Five barley loaves and two small fishes"—humble and scanty fare this!—were all that the disciples could produce. But the Son of God was there! He who made the heaven and the earth,—who provided seed for the sower and bread for the eater,—who clothed the hills with flocks and the valleys with corn,—was present, and the difficulty in His hands was of easy solution. The unbelief which once inquired,—"*Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*" was now to receive a most severe, because a most kind and benevolent answer. The table *was* furnished, and furnished with guests. Jesus, who had an exquisite taste for the picturesque, commanded the multitude to be artistically grouped "*in fifties and in hundreds upon the green grass.*" Then, taking the slender supply in His hands, and uplifting His prayer to God, He proceeded to distribute to the disciples, and the disciples to the people, and *they did eat and were filled.* How are we to account for this marvellous fact,—five thousand men fed to the full, from five loaves (a loaf for a thousand!) and two small fishes? By what power did our Lord perform this

feat? Was it by sleight-of-hand, or by collusion with His disciples, or by the power of evil magic?—for the sceptics of old affirmed that, "*He cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.*" Neither of these hypothesis will supply a fitting answer. It was a *miracle*—a supernatural act—and He who wrought it proved Himself Divine. His enemies had just been traducing His character and denying His Deity. As if to refute their slander and confound their blasphemy, He adduced this marvellous and undeniable evidence of His Godhead. Challenge the modern sceptics who deny the authority of miracles to imitate it! Bid the "spiritualists," the scoffers and the contemners of revelation of this Sadducean age, to assemble five thousand starving artizans in one place, and by necromancy, or legerdemain, or "spiritualism" satisfy their gnawing hunger with five barley loaves and two small fishes. How blank they look! How they skulk away, each one convicted in his own conscience of his littleness, his folly, and his crime!

Accept, my reader, this fact of our Lord's life as a miracle, and the miracle as an evidence of His Deity, and His Deity as all engaged for your present and eternal salvation. Limit not the power of your Divine Saviour. His Deity wrought your salvation,—is the basis of His atonement; and His atonement is the foundation of your hope: and His Deity is engaged to sustain you in every trial, to enable you to

surmount every difficulty, to supply your every want, to give you the victory over all your foes, and to conduct you to glory. Safe for ever is every soul committed to His keeping. All power on earth and in heaven is His: His, that He might give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given to Him; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of His hand, because He is God.

This miracle equally demonstrated the fact of our Lord's pure *humanity*. We read that, "*when He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion.*" The Lord Jesus was very man as He was very God. As man, He sympathizes with our humanity in all its varied conditions and wants, and as the God-Man He meets it all. Compassionating our need — He supplies it; pitying our grief—He soothes it; touched with our infirmity—He sustains it; sympathizing with our sickness—He heals it; commiserating our temptation—He scatters it; lenient towards our weakness—He places beneath us His everlasting arms. Precious are the blessings thus distilling from the Divine-human nature of our adorable Lord. How could we part with it? What fount of sympathy, what source of succour, what spring of soothing could be its substitute? What friend, what brother, what companion in tribulation, could take the place of the Incarnate God? Let this truth encourage you to take every sorrow, difficulty, and want to Christ.

The miracle illustrates, too, the power which our Lord possesses of increasing the little and of multiplying the few. Speak we of the Church of Christ? It is comparatively but a small body; and those incorporated Christian communities, composed of members of the one Body of Christ, who walk in the truth and ordinances of Christ blameless, yet smaller. But, nevertheless, with the Lord's blessing upon the preaching of His Gospel, and the earnest labours of His self-denying saints, both at home and in heathen lands, "*the little one shall become a thousand, and a small one, a strong nation.*" "*He will multiply them, that they shall not be few: and will glorify them, and they shall not be small.*" Let not, then, your hand slacken or your heart grow weary in the service of Christ, because of the feebleness of the instrumentality or the scantiness of the result. The few crumbs of the bread of life which you may scatter, He can so bless as to "*multiply your seed sown and increase the fruit of your righteousness.*" It is thus He employs a worm to thrash the mountain, and suffers the lame to take the prey, that He may secure all the glory to Himself. Not a crumb of the bread of life you give, not a grain of the precious seed you sow, but the Lord's blessing is in it, and shall so surely accompany its distribution as that ultimately it shall yield you a rich and eternal recompense of reward. If but *one* soul only is brought to Christ, if but one brand is snatched from the burn-

ing through your instrumentality, your life here will not have been in vain, and the crown you shall wear in the life hereafter will not be starless.

"The good begun by you will onward flow
In many a branching stream, and widening grow;
The seed that, in these few and busy hours,
Your hands unsparing and unwearied sow,
Shall deck your grave with amaranthian flowers,
And yield you fruits Divine in heaven's immortal bowers."

The miracle of feeding the five thousand encourages us to lean upon Christ's bountiful *providence*. Our resources may be narrow, our supplies humble and slender: but the Lord can so increase the little and multiply the few, as that the barrel of meal shall not waste, nor the cruise of oil fail until all our need is amply supplied. Those who possess but a "hand-basket portion" of this world's good, see most of the providential power and goodness of God. These learn to live upon His bounty, and to feel His care. They hang upon His hand as a child upon a parent; and doubly sweet to them the "bread" and refreshing to them the "water" it supplies,—for this is a Divinely assured portion,—when they can trace a Father's faithfulness and love in sending it. This life of faith in God may be trying to flesh and blood, and often humiliating to the natural pride of the human heart: nevertheless, it is a school in which many of the cardinal graces of the Spirit are developed and the Christian character is strengthened and matured, and,

above all, in which there is a more close transaction with, and consequently a more intimate knowledge of, the character of God. Look then, to Jesus to bless your limited means, and to increase your scanty and lessening supplies. He can prevent hunger, or He can meet its demands. He can remove a want, or He can supply its need. He has told you that your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things, and that He who openeth His hand and supplieth the want of every living thing, — who gems the landscape with flowers, pencils them with beauty and clothes them with perfume; who feeds the ravens when they cry, and guides the sparrow to its morning's repast,—will feed and clothe you, thou precious child of His love. "*Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*"

Nor must we overlook the higher truth our Lord doubtless intended to shadow forth in this distribution of bread to the famishing multitude, viz.,—Himself as the Bread of Life come down from heaven to meet the spiritual wants of a fallen and famished world. Without going out of our way, as we think has been erroneously done, to represent this breaking of bread to the multitude as Eucharistic,[a]—there being not the shadow of a reference in the incident to the *Lord's Supper*,—we yet may regard it as a symbol of the great and precious Gospel

[a] Trench.

truth which our Lord upon another occasion thus clearly enunciated,—"*I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever.*" What a glorious announcement is this for a poor sinner in whose soul the Holy Spirit has created a longing after Christ! None will come to Christ until they feel their need of Him; and none will eat of Christ until they possess a hungering for Him. "*He hath filled the hungry soul with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away.*" He Himself hath said,—"*Blessed are they that do hunger after righteousness.*" How much may we thus learn of Gospel truth from this miracle of Christ! Were these five thousand men needy and famishing?—*so spiritually are we.* Did they come to Christ empty handed, receiving the bread without money and without price?—*so spiritually may we.* Did they all eat and were filled?—*so spiritually may we.* Did Christ increase the little and multiply the few?—*so spiritually will He deal with us.* He can increase our small faith, deepen our feeble love, augment our little strength, and greatly add to our limited degree of grace. Such are some of the Gospel and vital truths illustrated by the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. May the Holy Spirit give to us a quickening, sanctifying, and saving possession and experience of their power in our souls!

We reach now the subject more especially under our notice,—the PRECEPT which our Lord enjoined at

this miraculous repast. "*He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*" There is scarcely less spiritual, practical teaching in the precept than in the miracle. At first sight this command of the Lord appears hardly consistent with His greatness and dignity. It would seem to be scarcely in agreement with the magnitude, the power, and the opulence of the resources just displayed. To an eye, resting but upon the surface of the precept, it seems to shade the splendour and lessen the grandeur of the miracle,—that, He who possessed the resources of infinity, and who had but just unlocked the treasury of His affluence, lavishing its wealth upon a needy multitude, should condescend to notice the *broken fragments* that remained over and above the generous and ample repast He had provided, would seem to awaken feelings in the hearts of some, fatal to their conception of the true sublime. And yet no act of our Lord's whole life more became Him than this. He was now acting in perfect agreement with Himself and in strict harmony with a law which, as we have shown, presided over all His works and operations—the law of *economy* and *frugality*. Let us simply open up and apply this precept thus taught by our blessed Lord, and see how truly consonant it is with His Divine greatness and glory. "*Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*"

We are taught that there is no thing too small, and

no event too trivial for our Lord to notice. For instance, we learn from this injunction of Christ, His estimate of little grace. Can we doubt this? What! did Christ regard the broken fragments of human food as not beneath His notice and His care; and will He, think you, look with indifference and disdain upon the smallest measure of grace, the feeblest budding of faith, the faintest spark of love in the soul of a beloved disciple? Never! This was not His wont when He dwelt with men. See Him crown the *faith* that touched but His fringe; see Him immortalize the *love* that anointed but His feet; see Him honour the *grace* that asked but the crumbs beneath the table; see Him respond to the cry of *penitence* in life's last, closing hour. O yes! the Spirit's work in the soul of a poor sinner is too Divine, costly, and precious—though it be never so feeble—to be lost. Christ will not lose a fragment nor a crumb. Every act of faith shall crown Him; every breath of life shall honour Him; every pulse of love shall praise Him. In heaven the "fragments" shall be gathered, and all shall be preserved and garnered up for ever; and all shall laud His name and augment His glory. Cheer up, thou gracious soul! Hast thou nothing in thine own estimation to bring to Jesus but "fragments?" nothing put a poor, sinful nature: a broken, contrite heart: a feeble, faltering faith: a faint, flickering love: a slow, halting footstep: a frail, imperfect service? here a little and there a little of thy

time, and talent, and substance? Cheer up! Jesus, thy Lord and Master despises not the "*day of small things;*" but says to His ministers,—"*Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.*" "*They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hands.*" The work of grace in your soul may be feeble, and you yourself a hidden child of God dwelling in the shade; nevertheless, it is the will of your Heavenly Father that not one of His little ones shall perish,—and shall *you* be the first?

But let me illustrate this precept of Christ, by its bearing upon our individual selves. How practical and solemn its teaching!

For example, we are taught to set a high value upon the *fragments of our spiritual grace and gift*, that nothing be lost. The Apostle John seemed to have an eye to this when he thus solemnly and touchingly exhorted the saints,—"*Look to yourselves, that ye* LOSE NOT THOSE THINGS WHICH YE HAVE WROUGHT; *but that we receive a full reward.*" The Apostles were alive to the danger of their own loss as ministers who had been instrumental of working this grace, as of those saints in whose hearts the grace had been wrought. The loss of one would be the loss of both. He exhorts the elect lady and her children to whom his letter was especially addressed, to watch over THEMSELVES, lest they be carried away by the errors by which they were surrounded. This is the first duty of a Christian.

Many a man has gone forth to combat with sin and error, not having first fortified and strengthened the citadel of *his own heart;* and presently he has been captured by the very foes he went forth to subdue. "*Look to* YOURSELVES!" says the Apostle. "Secure your own hearts; guard the citadel of your own soul first; see that the forts are well manned, and the avenues well patroled, and the sentinels awake at their posts, before you sally out to confront the enemy in the field." By this personal and careful vigilance they would be protected from loss of grace, and holiness, and gift; and so their reward and his in heaven would be greater. The greater *grace* here, the greater *glory* hereafter. Glory is grace in full-flower and bloom. As the seed, the germ, the flower here, so will be its fulness and perfection in heaven. The bliss and reward of heaven will be graduated by our personal holiness and service for Christ on earth. We *may* lose a portion of that bliss and reward. Our throne may be less elevated, our crown less radiant, our song less full, our joy less perfect,—we may not receive a "*full reward,*"—by wavering in our course, by tampering with sin, by being led away by the error of the wicked, by following Jesus afar off. O let us "*look to ourselves;* let us gather up the fragments of our grace and gifts that nothing be lost, but that the lowliest measure be made subservient to the glory of Christ, and that both we and Christ's ministers who brought us to Jesus, may "*receive a full reward.*"

The same law of economy applies to the nobler part of our being,—our *mental* powers. Our intellectual life is, for the most part, composed of fragments of thought,—single thoughts, isolated and alone. To this we may trace almost all the great discoveries in science, inventions in physics, and reforms in morals. A man of *one idea* may be slighted by the unthinking and be ridiculed by the frivolous; but that *one idea* has blest the race with his genius, and filled the world with his renown. Such, for example, was the discovery of *steam* as a propelling power, and of the *electric telegraph* as a highway of thought and of international intercourse. Such, too, the great social reforms which have tended to purify and elevate society,—the *temperance reformation*, so widely blest in emancipating the slave of strong drink, and making his home happy; the *penny postage*, drawing the heart of the nation into closer and more intelligent intercourse with itself. All these, and similar movements, had their birth in *one idea:* flashing, perhaps, upon the mind amid the busy hours of day, or stealing across it in the still hours of night. What spiritual light, liberty, and joy, too, have often sprung from one thought, or from one text of God's Word, suggested to the believer by the Holy Spirit! That *one* thought! O what a new world has burst upon the mind: what a new sun has arisen upon the soul: what a new creation, bathed in glory and rich with a thousand sweets, has floated before

the eye of God's child. What a fresh discovery of God's character, what a precious glimpse of the Saviour's loveliness and love, it has poured in upon the believing soul who has gone on its way rejoicing. Despise not, then, one idea. A single thought, yea, the mere fragment of a thought, who can tell what may lie hidden within its bosom! The fragment of a block of marble may be chiselled into a breathing statue; the fragment of a sheet of canvas may be pencilled into a speaking picture; the fragment of a lump of clay may be moulded into a beautiful vase. Let us look to ourselves, then, that we allow no intellectual waste, no prodigality of mind; that, not a thought, or purpose, or resolve be lost, which by prayer and culture might have been made subservient to the good of man and the glory of God. Has such a thought found an entrance within your heart? Suffer it not to depart; cherish it, communicate it to others: above all, in prayer commit it to the Lord. Who can tell what may be its result? A tiny seed, a little bud now, it yet may germinate, expand, and branch forth as into a noble tree, whose fruit and foliage shall bless the world.

How much, too, may we economize our *time?* Time is priceless and precious. In one point of view, it is more important and solemn than eternity. Eternity is the creature of time: it is just what time makes it, —happy or miserable, a blessing or a curse, draped with clouds of endless night, or gilded with beams of

eternal day. One hour of time is of more value to a soul speeding to the judgment, unprepared to meet its dread sentence, than the ceaseless evolutions of eternity. There is no day of grace,—no opportunity of conversion,—no proclamation of salvation, in another world. "Now *is the accepted time*, NOW *is the day of salvation.*" Let us, then, "*redeem the time*," because "*the time is short.*" Gathering up its unemployed hours, its spare moments; redeeming it from sleep, from frivolous calls, from vain recreation, how much work for God and service for man may be accomplished! Many a valuable volume has been compiled at the breakfast table,—many a useful plan has been matured in a railway carriage,—and many a work for Christ has been arranged while yet but few had brushed the dew of morning's slumber from their eyelids, which otherwise the absorbing calls of professional and public life had rendered impossible. Human life is made up of a succession of trifles, and its great achievements of fugitive thought. We must not wait for great occasions in order to accomplish great things. "He who waits to do a great deal of good at once," remarks Dr. Johnson, "will never do any." He who stands upon the river's bank until its tide shall turn or cease to flow, may stand until doomsday, and have done nothing. He must seize it at its height, throw himself upon its bosom, and let it bear him on to some great and noble end. Grand occasions are

rare, and yet more rare are the grand actions to which they give birth, men almost invariably proving themselves unequal to the occasion. But we need not travel far, nor wait long for suitable occasions to do good. Within our own homes, at our very doors, in each hour, the "sweet charities of life" may be fully employed. If these are allowed to pass unimproved, God will not entrust to our hands greater. "*He that is unfaithful in that which is least, is also unfaithful in much.*" O it is marvellous how much useful service may be performed by a strict economy of time, and by embracing every small occasion for its employment. "*In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand.*" "*Blessed are they that sow beside* ALL *waters.*" He who watches God's providence, whose daily inquiry is,—"*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*" shall not long be idle. A Christian lady, on a recent occasion, one morning made it a subject of earnest prayer to the Lord to give her some work to do for Him. In the course of the same day she was waited upon with a request to take the important charge of a mother's class, which had just become vacant by the death of the lady who had conducted it with much success for years. Thus, in answer to prayer, the Lord will give to every one of His servants his work. Thus, then, let us gather up the broken fragments,—the scattered crumbs of time, that nothing be lost. All

are accountable to God for precious time! How solemn the account of *wasted* time! What is eternity, but time, divested of its probation, prolonged to endless ages,—moments of time never ceasing! Up, then, and work for God! There is work for all. None need fold their hands in sloth. "*Why stand ye here all the day idle?*" Your talents may be humble, your sphere limited, yet how much you may do for God and for man!

The drops of rain and the rays of light
Are small themselves: but when all unite,
They water the world, and they make it bright.

Then do not say,—"Of what use am I?"
We may each do good, if we will but try;
We may soothe some grief, or some want supply.

We can lend to the poor a helping hand;
We can cheer the sick, as we by them stand;
We can send God's Word to a heathen land.

We can speak to others in tones of love;
We can dwell in peace, like the gentle dove;
We can point the weary to rest above.

O how sweet to think that in life's young days
We may live to show forth our Saviour's praise,
And may guide some feet into Wisdom's ways.

Thus, too, with our *worldly possessions*. There is to be no improvidence here. By a wise husbanding of our temporal resources, however limited, by a prudent frugality and judicious economy, how much may be

rescued from needless expenditure and sinful waste, and be devoted to advance some benevolent and Christian object, useful to man and glorifying to God. Money, as we have in another chapter remarked, is a responsible and solemn talent. The fragments must be gathered up that nothing be lost. With many of the Lord's people, Christian beneficence can only be exercised by a strict economy of their resources. By a little self-denial here, and by a little frugality there,—gathering up the fragments over and above necessary demands, —they are enabled materially to aid the cause of God and of truth in the world. We are but stewards of property, and must not waste our Master's goods. It was a pious and noble resolution of a Christian physician, —"I am resolved, with God's help, from whom all good thoughts and pious actions proceed, to whose grace we are indebted for any good we are enabled to do, to devote all fees earned and received on Sunday, and the tenth of all money received on week-days, for the promoting of the cause of Christ, and for the spiritual and temporal welfare of my fellow creatures." This is true Christian beneficence: a beneficence not the result of a fitful and momentary impulse, but springing from Christian principle,—from the love of God in the heart,—the fruit of a steady and fixed purpose. "Seek not proud riches," says Bacon "but such as thou mayest get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly;" and to this we may add,

such as a judicious economy may frugally save, and a Christian benevolence may usefully scatter.

In conclusion: undervalue and overlook not the *trifles* of life. As there is not a sunbeam that glows, nor an insect that sports in its warmth; not a breath of air nor an atom of matter borne upon its wing, that has not its appointed mission, and that accomplishes not a useful end, so there is nothing, however trivial or trifling in our individual life, that may not be subservient to some noble and useful purpose. There is meaning in the words of the poet:—

> "Think naught a trifle, though it small appear:
> Sands make the mountains, moments make the year,
> And trifles life: your care to trifles give,
> Or you may die before you learn to live."

See that there is no waste in your life. Have you an excess of *prosperity?*—feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the orphan, and make the widow's heart to sing for joy. Have you an excess of *happiness?*—let its overflowings distill into the cup of some child of woe, who, perchance, has none. Have you *leisure?*—devote it to help forward some useful enterprise, the wheels of which, perhaps, are standing still for the lack of a voluntary hand. Gather up the fragments, from whatever source they spring, that even these may advance the fame of Jesus, the glory of God, and the well-being of man. Once more, we

remind you, that in God's economy of the universe, nothing is lost. Nor shall it be in our individual history. If our intellectual faculties are misemployed, —if our influence is abused,—if our time is wasted,— if our property is squandered,—if our one talent is buried in the earth,—if, in a word, we are living to ourselves, and not unto God,—not even these things shall be lost! They have gone forth upon a solemn mission to be executed in the great day of account. Then will they appear as witnesses against us, when each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Not lost! O no! Failing to aid the cause of mercy, they will advance the purpose of judgment; laying up for us no treasure in heaven, they will pave our descent into the shades of despair, where God will by no means clear the guilty. No,—

Nothing is lost! The drop of dew
  Which trembles on the leaf or flower
Is but exhaled, to fall anew
  In summer's thunder shower;
Perchance to shine within the bow
  That fronts the sun at fall of day,—
Perchance to sparkle in the flow
  Of fountains far away.

Nothing is lost! The tiniest seed
  By wild birds borne, or breezes blown,
Finds something suited to its need,
  Wherein 'tis sown and grown.

The language of some household song,
  The perfume of some cherished flower,
Though gone from outward sense, belong
  To memory's after hour.

So with our words; or harsh or kind,
  Uttered, they are not all forgot;
They leave their influence on the mind,
  Pass on, but perish not!
So with our deeds; for good or ill
  They have their power scarce understood;
Then let us use our better will
  To make them rife with good!

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED.

JEREMIAH xiii. 21.

"What wilt thou say when He shall punish thee?"

As we pass through life many sad and solemn scenes meet our eye,—the natural result of the fall and the bitter fruit of sin. But, perhaps, no spectacle is invested with a solemnity so appalling as that of a criminal at the bar of justice, awaiting the judgment of the court, to whom the Judge, wearing the awful symbol of condemnation, addresses the terrible question,—"Prisoner at the bar, what have you to say wherefore the sentence of death should not be passed upon you?" Awfully impressive as is this scene, it is but the faint shadow of a spectacle infinitely more appalling which awaits this fallen world,—*the final and eternal condemnation of the wicked.* That such an event is reasonable the light of nature teaches, and that it is certain, the Book of Revelation declares. Reason would teach us that, living under a moral govern-

ment—a government of rewards and punishments,—if we do well, it is accepted of God, and that if we do not well, sin lieth at the door and is righteously punished. Thus by the dim light of nature we may learn that, that must be an *unholy* government which would allow *sin* to pass unpunished, and that, that must be an *unjust* government that would allow *good* to go unrewarded. But, in proof of a judgment to come we have stronger evidence than that of reason. Divine revelation comes to our aid, and affirms emphatically and solemnly that, "*We must all appear before the* JUDGMENT SEAT *of Christ, that every man may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*" That, "*God hath appointed a day in which He will* JUDGE *the world in righteousness.*" That, "*the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints to execute* JUDGMENT *upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly of all their unrighteous deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*" Such are some of the Scripture declarations concerning this momentous subject. It is to one particular view our present reading will be restricted,—viz., *the final, awful, and everlasting punishment of the ungodly.*

If we saw a friend arraigned in a criminal court of justice about to be tried for his life, we would naturally and anxiously inquire,—"Are you well prepared

with your defence? Have you carefully weighed every tittle of the evidence, and thoroughly examined the nature of the plea you purpose to adduce?" To the sinner speeding to the judgment seat of Christ we address a similar but an infinitely more momentous inquiry,—"Are you *prepared* for your trial? With what plea are you provided in arrest of judgment? What have you to say wherefore the sentence of eternal death should not be pronounced upon you? Have you any excuse for your sins, any palliation of your crimes, any reason for your rejection of His Son, which the Judge will accept? '*What wilt thou say when He shall* PUNISH THEE?'—what plea, what excuse, what extenuation will you allege when the Judge shall proceed to pronounce the awful sentence of eternal doom?" Such is the solemn, awakening subject, which now asks your serious and prayerful attention. May the Holy Spirit aid and bless our meditation!

First, with regard to the CERTAINTY of the punishment of the wicked. No truth is more clearly revealed in the Bible than that, it is God's solemn purpose *to punish the ungodly.* It must, from the very necessity of the case, be so. God is holy, and if just to Himself He must from the holiness of His nature punish sin. Were the ungodly, the impenitent and the unbelieving to go unpunished, what a lowering of His moral government, and what an indelible dishonour to Himself would

present itself to the eyes of all the holy beings in heaven. *Sin* can never go *unpunished.* God's holiness, and justice, and truth must be vindicated, either in the person of the sinner or in the person of a substitute. A few declarations from God's Word will be sufficient to set this momentous question at rest. That of our text is decisive :—"*He shall* PUNISH *thee.*" "*Who will by no means clear the guilty.*" "*The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be* PUNISHED *with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*"[a] "*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be* PUNISHED."[b] "*How can ye escape the damnation of hell?*"[c] "*Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*"[d] What need we further evidence of the awful truth that, God will most surely punish the wicked? The Bible is replete with awful examples confirmatory of the fact. The destruction of the antediluvian world by water, of the Cities of the Plain by fire, of Jerusalem by the invasion of Titus, and countless other examples testify

[a] 2 Thess. i. 9. [b] 2 Pet. ii. 9.

[c] Matt. xxiii. 33. [d] Heb. ii. 3.

to His hatred of sin and of His inexorable justice in punishing it. And, were it possible to unveil the bottomless pit, and for a moment penetrate the "mist of darkness" that enshrouds the damned, with what startling and convincing force would the terrible fact flash upon every sceptical mind, hitherto wont to regard hell as a myth and to make sport of its quenchless fire! Nothing, my unconverted reader, has kept you from increasing the countless witnesses to the truth that, God will by no means clear the guilty, but His infinite, long-suffering patience. "*The long-suffering of God is salvation.*" It has been thus far *your* salvation from immediate destruction, into which at any moment of its suspension, and at any hour of your being, you may inevitably and irremediably be plunged. There is no want of *power* on the part of God to do this. More easily than you can crush a worm, or snap a thread, can God cast you into hell. He but "*looketh* upon the earth and it trembleth," and, "at His *rebuke* the rocks are thrown down!" It is no security against this awful infliction of God's power that there are no visible means of death at hand, no apparent prospect of immediate destruction. They *are* at hand, however unseen by you. When you go forth in the morning in an unrenewed state, your whole path throughout the day is on the very brink of an eternity of woe, and along the very mouth of the bottomless pit. The bow of death is bent, and the arrow, pointing at

your heart, is upon the string, waiting but God's word to bid it fly. There is no necessity that God should suspend a single law of nature in order to remove you from the world. He has but to unveil His power, to withdraw His restraints, and the finest hair, an atom of matter, a simple vapour, a drop of blood, could send your soul into eternity. Over the abyss of hell God holds you in His hand, as you would hold a deadly scorpion over burning coals, ready to let it fall. What are you in His sight, viewed as in your sins and guilt and rebellion, but as a loathsome thing, more repulsive and hateful to Him than to you is the most venomous serpent that drags its slimy form across your path. Nay, more, you are under present condemnation. "*He that believeth not is condemned already.*" The sentence is not yet executed, the law has not yet taken effect; but like a criminal condemned to die, you only wait the solemn knell that announces the awful moment has arrived. Again I remind you that nothing but the good pleasure of God keeps you any moment out of hell. No robustness of health, no watchful guards posted along the avenues of life, no adroit evasion of the pestilence, no running from danger, no preservatives against, or palliatives of, disease, no remedy or skill, can prevail when God ceases His forbearance and withdraws His power. Then will He "*laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh.*" "*I will tread them in Mine anger and trample them*

in My fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon My garments, and I will stain all My raiment." O solemn thought, that the Omnipotence of God will so crush out the blood of ungodly men, that it shall sprinkle and stain His very garments! Can any image convey to us a more appalling idea of the destruction of the wicked? "*What if God, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?*" What if that longsuffering should in a moment cease?—that moment you are in hell! All the ministers of grace on earth, and all the angels of God in heaven, could not prevent you when the pit opens its mouth to swallow you up. Presume not, then, upon the patience and longsuffering of God. Persist not in sin and rebellion. "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*" God grant that this may not be your presumption and your end!

The punishment of the wicked will be *terrible in the extreme.* The imagination of man cannot conceive any calamity so appalling as the final condition of a lost soul. The Italian poet Dante, with his terribly vivid imagination and marvellous powers of description, has drawn an appalling picture of hell; but no picture is so appalling, and none so true, as that presented to us in the Word of God. What are some of the expressions and images employed by the sacred penmen, to de-

lineate the place and condition of the lost? Listen to them attentively, my reader, ponder them thoughtfully, and pray over them earnestly,—it is for your life! The hell of the wicked is described as the "*outpouring of God's wrath*"—as "*the lake of fire*"—as "*fire and brimstone*"—as the "*bottomless pit*"—as "*the worm that dieth not, and as the fire that shall never be quenched*"—as "*damnation*"—as "*the perdition of ungodly men*"—as "*torment*"—as an "*impassable gulf*"—as "*outer darkness*"—as "*the gnashing of teeth*"—as "*destruction from the presence of the Lord*"—as the "*winepress of the wrath of Almighty God*"—as "*the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever.*" Surely we need not multiply these appalling expressions, so vividly and truly descriptive of the terrible condition of sinners falling into the hands of a holy, just, and angry Lord God. Will not this suffice to arouse, alarm, and induce you to pause and reflect upon what may be, upon what *must* be, the final end of your present course of sin and rebellion against God,—of the rejection of Christ, and of the self-destruction of your own soul. Dying unconverted, dying with the weapons of hostility against God in your hands—terrible witnesses to your treason and your crime!—how can you escape the damnation of hell?

The punishment of the wicked, thus terrible, will yet be *most righteous.* No truth will flash upon the condemned mind with more overwhelming force in

the last great day than this,—the perfect *righteousness of God* in the condemnation of the ungodly. Sinners will read in the lurid light of the quenchless flames of hell, as they never read before, the strict *justice* of their doom. In their eyes, God's throne, though awful, will appear guiltless; His justice, though severe, most just; and the sentence, though more terrible than thought can conceive, or language describe, based upon the principles of the divinest equity. O sinner, thou neglecter of the great salvation, thou despiser and rejecter of Jesus, thou slave of Satan, thou servant of sin, thou Sabbath-breaker, thou profane, thou unclean, thou who maketh and loveth a lie, how will these sins then rise before you in all their measureless magnitude, indescribable blackness, and ineffaceable guilt! You will then remember—for no faculty of the mind will be in such awful force as *memory*—you will then *remember* the glorious Gospel that you heard but to turn from it; the faithful sermons but to reject them; the life-boat of salvation that floated to your aid but to reject it; the convictions you had but to stifle them; the hand of God outstretched to you but to spurn it; the loving, beseeching Saviour inviting you but to disbelieve, despise, and reject Him! Then will you see that you preferred sin to holiness, Satan to God, yourself to Christ, hell to heaven, eternal woe to eternal happiness. Will not your condemnation, then, be strictly just? In giving you what

you asked, in granting you what you preferred, in assigning to you a doom you yourself intelligently, deliberately, solemnly chose, will you not be most equitably judged, and most righteously condemned? Most assuredly! Every lost soul shall acknowledge that he himself, and not God, was the author of his ruin: "I am here," he will exclaim, "in this insufferable agony, in this interminable torment, in this quenchless fire, because I chose it. I am a moral suicide. I loved my sin, and served Satan, and followed the world; made a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell, and I now receive the due reward of my choice. The wages of sin is death: I faithfully earned my wages, and the just payment thereof is mine. '*Thou art righteous, O Lord, in that Thou hast judged thus.*'" This conducts to another and a yet more solemn thought.

The punishment of the ungodly will be ETERNAL. That there should be those who deny this truth is no marvel. Satan has left no art unemployed, and no effort untried, to lessen in the eyes of sinners the terribleness of their appalling doom. One of his most ingenious and successful devices is, *the denial of the eternity of future punishment.* If he can succeed in palming upon his victims the fiction that hell is a myth; or, if this idea is too monstrous to believe, that it is, at the least, but a place of temporary purification, washed in whose flames, and purified by whose sufferings, the soul is

fitted to enter Paradise, he has done much to lessen the apprehension of its terrors, and to reconcile the sinner to the thought of his dread doom. Hence the popular notion of an ideal hell, or else of a brief purgatorial state of punishment, so welcome to the depraved nature, the sin-loving heart of man. But no sophistry of Satan, and no ingenuity of error, and no self-deception of the human heart touches the revealed doctrine that the future punishment of the wicked is *endless*. In vindication of this all-momentous and all-solemn subject, human reason shall be silent. Let God's Word alone speak. His voice only shall be heard. And even here we are compelled to place a limit. A few Scripture proofs only must suffice. To the law and to the testimony let us refer a doctrine, involving interests outweighing the worth of ten thousand worlds like this. Listen devoutly and believingly to the following declarations :—

"*The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel; who shall be* PUNISHED *with* EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION *from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.*"[e] "*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to* EVERLASTING LIFE, *and some to shame and* EVERLASTING CONTEMPT."[f] "*Depart*

[e] 2 Thess. i. 7—9. [f] Dan. xii. 2.

from Me, ye cursed, into EVERLASTING FIRE, *prepared for the devil and his angels.*"[g] "*And these shall go away into* EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT, *but the righteous into* LIFE ETERNAL."[h] "*If thy hand offend thee cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that* NEVER *shall be quenched; where their worm* DIETH NOT, *and the fire is* NOT QUENCHED."[i] "*To whom the mist of darkness is reserved* FOR EVER." "*And her smoke rose up* FOR EVER AND EVER." Let these awful statements suffice to prove the scripturalness of the doctrine, of the *endlessness*, the *eternity* of future punishment. And O what imagination can conceive the terribleness of *never-ending* woe! How dreadful and indescribable the anguish of *one moment's* endurance of hell fire! Imagine then, if it be possible, what interminable ages must be: millions and millions of years rolling round, and yet millions and millions more to roll,—and still no nearer the end of suffering than when it first began! O who can adequately portray the state of the soul in such a woe as this? And yet see how sinners risk eternal happiness, and court everlasting torment, and rush into quenchless flames, for the carnal, sensual, worldly enjoyment of a moment!

Listen, O listen to the searching, solemn question of

[g] Matt. xxv. 41. [h] Matt. xxv. 46.

[i] Matt. xviii. 8.

our Lord: "*What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*" The loss of the soul! What can compensate for such a catastrophe? What make up for such a loss? Not present wealth, —nor fame,—nor pleasure,—nor aught that earth can give when once the soul is cast away for ever! O whatever else you lose, lose not your precious, priceless, immortal soul. Once lost, it is lost FOR EVER!

"Lord, shall we part with gold for dross,
With solid good for show!
Outlive our bliss, and mourn our loss
In everlasting woe!

"Let us not lose the living God
For one short dream of joy,
With fond embrace cling to a clod
And fling all heaven away.

"Vain world, thy weak attempts forbear,—
We all thy charms defy,
And rate our precious souls too dear
For all thy wealth to buy."

But God propounds a personal, searching, and solemn question: "*What wilt thou say when He shall punish thee?*" In other words, "What, sinner, will be your excuse, what your line of defence, what your plea in arrest of judgment when God shall arise to punish?" What should we think of the wisdom of a man about to stand in a court of justice to meet a charge imperilling his most precious interests, who had bestowed no

reflection whatever upon his line of defence? Or, yet more, what would be our opinion of the sanity of a criminal arraigned upon a capital charge, whose proposed proofs of innocence and pleas of defence should be of the most puerile and childish, even of a most treasonable and criminating nature? But such will certainly and inevitably be the position of every unconverted sinner cited to appear at Christ's tribunal in judgment. What then will *you* say?

You will not, as a rational being, with your mental faculties unimpaired, and your consciousness of right and wrong unclouded, be able to plead exemption from punishment on the ground of *irresponsibility.* Nor can you plead that you possessed no Bible—had not been favoured with a preached Gospel—had not heard of Christ—had not been warned by providence, nor admonished by conscience, nor moved by conviction, nor stirred by the Spirit. You cannot prefer the plea that you had *no time* to seek salvation; that your incitements to sin were irresistible, your evil passions irrepressible, your position in life surrounded by influences with which you had no power to combat. None of these pleas—even had you the temerity to present them—would avail to arrest the stern and terrible arm of Divine law and justice. What then will you say when He shall punish you? Alas! like the intruder at the marriage feast not having on a wedding garment, to this solemn, heart-search-

ing appeal you will be "*speechless.*" You have now your ready excuses, your plausible arguments, your ingenious pleas wherefore you should not be religious. You can start objections, and indulge in cavils, and postpone to a more convenient season the great work of conversion, the duty of repentance and faith, but what will you do in the solemn day? What will you answer Him when God shall punish you? Will you dispute His authority, defy His power, or flee from His presence? This you cannot do. All beings now bend to Him the knee, and all nations are prostrate at His feet. Escape from Him you cannot. No rocks, or mountains, or hills move at your call, to veil you from His eye, or shield you from His wrath. Speechless and self-condemned, bound hand and foot, you are led away, and "*cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.*" Inquire, in the language of Job,—"*What then shall I do when God riseth up? And when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him?*"

But need this be your terrible and inevitable doom? Listen to the touching message of God: "*As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wiched turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?*"[1] "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and*

[1] Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon Him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."[k] In proof of this God has provided an expedient most glorifying to Himself and suitable to us, by which the greatest sinner, repenting of his sins and believing in Christ, may be saved. It is revealed in those wondrous words: "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Accept, in penitence and faith and gratitude, this marvellous message of love; abandon your excuses, ground your weapons of rebellion against God; turn from your evil ways, look to the Cross, accept the Saviour, believe and be saved! God now *commands* you to repent, and Christ now *invites* you to believe. Why, then, should you perish? Is there no balm in Gilead, and no Physician there? Is there no life-boat that will rescue you from the yawning abyss, no plank that will float you safely to the shore? Oh yes! There is a Physician—it is Jesus. There is balm—it is His precious, sin-atoning blood. There is a plank that will snatch you from death—it is the Cross of Calvary. There is a life-boat that will bear you through the surging billows in safety to the shore of Heaven—it is the Saviour who, upon the Cross, died for the

[k] Isaiah lv. 7.

chief of sinners, and of whom it is recorded that, "*He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.*" Why then will you, why *should* you die?

Believer in Jesus! that day of wrath, that scene of punishment will have no woe nor terror for you. The day that will "*rain upon the wicked snares, and fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest,*" will be to you a day of salvation, of glory, and of triumph. You will be found in Christ, robed with His righteousness, and washed from every stain in His blood. Your present faint love will then be found true love; your weak faith, real faith; your trembling hope, firm as the throne. Christ has engaged in covenant to bring home all that the Father gave to Him. There will not be one stray sheep from His fold, not one missing jewel from His cabinet, not a soul lost for whom he shed His atoning blood. All will be there when He comes in majesty, glory, and power to receive and to present His Bride to His Father. Oh, what a day of glory, of bliss, of triumph will that day be to you! From myriads of voices—and your's will swell the harmony—the anthem of salvation, the shout of joy will ascend and roll through the mansions of heaven: "*Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in Him.*" The very elements which will be employed in the everlasting destruction of the wicked, will be the very elements which will unite in

the everlasting salvation of the righteous. The waters which drowned the antediluvian sinners, bore Noah and his family in safety to the shore. What proved a grave to the one, proved as an ark to the others. Terrible as the last day will be to the ungodly, it will be a day of consummate glory to the saints. In the person and face of the Judge you will recognize the form and countenance of the Saviour. The eye that will flash indignation and vengeance upon His enemies, will beam love and kindness and welcome upon His friends. The voice, louder and more piercing than ten thousand thunders, which will say to them "DEPART!"—sweeter and more melodious than the united harps of angels, will say to you "COME!" The Lord grant that we may find mercy of Him in that day. "*Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?—who among us shall dwell in everlasting burnings?*" Not one who has fled as a poor, lost sinner to the Cross, and has hid him in the wounded side of the Saviour. Covered within a cleft of this Rock, he shall be safe in the great, the terrible Day of the Lord. Reader! are *you* there? then, go forth and live and labour, and if need be, suffer and die for Christ! If not there, give no sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids, until you know that you are!

"*Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the*

officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

"How will thy heart endure
The terrors of that day,
When earth and Heaven before His face
Astonished, shrink away?

"But ere the trumpet shakes
The mansions of the dead,
Hark! from the Gospel's gentle voice
What joyful tidings spread.

"Ye sinners seek His grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of the Cross
And find salvation there."

THE NEW SONG OF HEAVEN.

REVELATION xiv. 3.

"And they sang as it were a new song before the throne."

THIS passage opens to us a door in Heaven, through which, as it were, its music steals. The service of heaven is preëminently the service of *song*. Music celebrated the beginning of this creation, and music will celebrate its close. When the new-born creature first entered the paradise of earth, the morning stars sang together for joy. When the renewed soul enters the paradise of heaven, all the minstrels of glory strike their golden harps, and music welcomes home their sister-spirit. The chief recreation, then, of heaven will, doubtless, be—PRAISE. And can we imagine a more appropriate employment?—a more natural and befitting expression of the new-born feelings of the glorified? *Prayer*—now so needful and precious—would then seem unnatural and out of place; and *praise*—now so faint and faltering—will then be but the spontaneous, full, and universal outburst of every happy spirit. In the absence of all evil and in the presence

of all good, there can be no want of *material* for music in heaven. And when the saved sinner, once so vile and lost,—when the renewed believer, once so filled with doubt and trembling, finds himself safe in heaven at last, O will its walls, its arches, and its dome ever cease to ring and reverberate with his hallelujahs, thanksgiving, and praise? Think also, above and beyond all, when the eye rests upon JESUS, when the glorified form of the exalted Redeemer occupying the central throne, robed in majesty, first bursts upon the view,—when the panting spirit folds its weary wing within His blessed embrace, and meets the loving welcome of His eye, will aught but *praise*—praise waking every faculty, employing every thought, inspiring every affection—occupy the mind and engage for ever the heart of the countless throng circling the throne of the Lamb?

The vision now unveiling to our eye is a magnificent one. John looked, and lo! a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, surrounded by a great multitude of the redeemed, upon whose forehead His Father's name was written. And he heard music. It was the voice of harpers harping with their harps. "*And they sang as it were a new song before the throne.*" To this New Song of the redeemed let *us* now bend a listening ear. If we are Christ's, if we love Him, are following and serving Him, then this New Song has a profound and entrancing interest for us. We, too, shall one day pos-

sess a harp, and shall wake it to the swelling music of the New Song of Heaven. For this the Lord is now *preparing* us, as we shall presently more fully show. Every grace imparted and every sin subdued, every assault made and every temptation overcome,—tested by trial, purified by affliction, chastened by sorrow, taught by adversity, God is training us to sing the song of heaven. All the manifestations of Christ to our souls, all that we now see of His glory, taste of His love, experience of His grace, and learn of His truth, forms part of our education on earth for the choir of heaven. Through suffering our God is training us for song; by sorrow and tears and groans He is fitting us for the sweet, entrancing, never-ending music of the skies. Learning thus to sing the New Song upon earth,—in what higher sense will it be *new* when we arrive in heaven? To this question let us briefly turn our attention.

In the first place, those who sing it will be, in the most enlarged sense, *new creatures.* Renewed in part now by the Holy Spirit, this spiritual renewal admits of a more comprehensive meaning in heaven. Heaven is occupied by beings once our fellow-travellers and companions in tribulation, and like us born again of the Spirit. But the work of grace, carried to the highest state of culture earth would admit, is now *complete.* The Divine image is perfect,—the spiritual kingdom is finished,—the bud has beauteously

flowered,—the blossom is set in golden fruit,—the outline of the picture is filled up,—the embryo saint has become a glorified spirit; and now the New Song ascends from hearts perfected in holiness, and breaths from the lips of choristers "*without fault before the throne.*" O what then must be the deep melody of that song! With what *new* emphasis must they sing it in the happy consciousness of perfect holiness, of entire freedom from all the taint, and guilt, and power of sin! Every *present* victory over the promptings to sin wakes a new song from the lips. But what will be the music of the soul, what the newness and melody of the song, when the last fetter of corruption is broken, and the spirit is entirely and for ever free! My dear reader, permit me earnestly to enforce the absolute necessity of your being "*born again,*" of your becoming a "*new creature in Christ Jesus,*" ere you can join in the New Song of Heaven. It will be a *new* song sung only by a *new* creature. What share in this anthem could a heart take still the seat of all sin? What sympathy with its music could a mind feel armed in all its powers with enmity and hatred against God? None whatever! We *must* be spiritually changed, must be divinely regenerated, must be born of the Spirit, ere we can be admitted to participate in the New Song of Heaven. The Lord Jesus shadowed forth this essential truth, when He reminded us that, "*the new wine must be put into new*

bottles." The new song of the Lamb,—the inspiration of perfect love, of complete holiness, of consummate bliss, and of endless glory,—can only breathe from a soul all whose powers and affections Divine grace has made *new.* There must be spiritual harmony between the minstrel and the song, a moral fitness of the instrument and the music.

Again. The song of heaven will be "*new*" because *it will be sung in a new world.* Heaven is a place, not a state,—a locality, and not a condition of the redeemed soul. "*I go,*" said the Lord, "*to prepare a* PLACE *for you.*" We know not in what part of boundless space this new and glorious world is,—for the revelations which we possess of heaven are but partial and dim,—but of this we are assured, that heaven is where Christ is, and wherever Christ is that will be heaven to the Christ-loving believer, and where He is *not* will be hell. Now the glorified are in a new place. They have fled from this fallen planet, have escaped from this sinful earth, and have entered upon a new existence, in a new world. Blessed thought! they are away from all the sins and evils, the privations and sufferings of this time-state. The lone-path is no more bedewed with their tears; the solitude of the mountain no longer echoes with their groans; the mind is no more affected by sin, misery, and care; the heart is no more shaded by sorrow;—they are in heaven, the inhabitants of a new world, the occupants of a new

home, the companions of new associates, engaged in new employments—and all this essentially contributes to the freshness and sweetness of their new-born song.

The *circumstances are new* in which the glorified sing this new song. In heaven how changed is all that appertains to the believer! Behold all things have become new! It would seem at first sight as if it would be impossible to recognize our ownselves. We shall probably find it difficult to imagine that we were the sinful, the vile, the frail and infirm beings that we once were. *Then* we possessed such unamiable dispositions, such selfish natures, such low-born minds, such corrupt and sinful hearts. But O how changed do we find ourselves now! All is new,—all is ennobled thought, perfect love, untainted joy, unmingled bliss. Nothing remains to recall our identity save the grace that called, sanctified, kept, and at last brought us home to God,—the divine image and superscription of the soul is now visible, resplendent and indelible. We marvel not that the song which celebrates this new creation, this spiritual renovation of the soul, should never cease to be the "*new song sung before the throne.*"

The *materials* which compose this song will be ever new. It will open with Redemption,—it will begin with Christ. JESUS the Saviour will be its grand theme, its endless burden. Myriads of ages will re-

volve upon their golden hinges, and still the song will be of Jesus and His love, as new, as melodious, and as wondrous as when its first notes broke in trembling ecstacies from the lips of the glorified. And as His person unveils new beauties, and His love new depths, and His grace new wonders, and His atoning sufferings and death new and still surpassing glories,—the stupendous redemption of man thus dilating in magnitude and heightening in grandeur,—the song will grow in the richness of its tone, in the sweetness of its music, and in the majesty of its meaning,—ever and for ever, the *new* song sung by redeemed minstrels before the throne of God and the Lamb.

The perpetually recurring *memories of the past* will contribute to the endless music of this song. The opening mysteries of Providence, blending with the unveiling prodigies of grace, will be ever supplying fresh material for wonder, gratitude, and praise. As each volume is unsealed, and as each chapter is read, and as each sentence is studied, and as each line is scanned, and as each word is spelled in the marvellous history of all the way the Lord our God skilfully and tenderly and safely brought us through the wilderness, across the desert, and over the flood, another and a higher chord will be added to the music of this anthem, making it ever new.

"Above the rest this note will swell,—
Our Jesus hath done all things well."

The *enlarged and ever enlarging capacity of the soul* will contribute essentially to the development of this song. With new powers of song there will be new strains of melody. With the continued expansion of the spirit will come increased capacity of thought and feeling; and with each accession of intelligence and love will come fresh material for praise; and thus, as the mind expands in its knowledge of God's character, as the heart grows larger with the love of Christ, and the soul gets deeper views of that free and sovereign grace which chose it to eternal life, the new and heavenly song will wax louder and louder, and ascend higher and higher, and grow sweeter and sweeter, rolling its rich majestic strains along the high, arched roof of heaven. The study will be interminable. Never shall we come to the end of Christ's love and grace, or of God's wisdom and power and glory in our salvation. Never shall we exhaust our gratitude, nor reach the last throb of love to the Saviour for having, by the sacrifice of Himself, and by His free and sovereign grace, brought us there; and thus new, increasingly new, ever new, will be the song that will wake the undying symphonies of eternity.

But an important truth is suggested to us here. This song is *learnt*, and learnt *on earth*, and learnt only by the *redeemed*. There is a remarkable passage bearing on this truth, recorded in the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation and third verse. It is this:—

"*No man could* LEARN *that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were* REDEEMED *from the* EARTH." The saints of God are trained for heaven. Earth is the SCHOOL of our graces. "*No man could* LEARN *that song.*" The new song is a learnt, an acquired song. It is not learnt by intuition, nor acquired by ear, nor taught by man,—but in the school of God; and oftimes by a discipline the nature of which would seem to unbelief and sense the most unlikely to promote and mature the soul's fitness for the choir of heaven. But to be able to sing it, it *must* be learnt. The great masters of human art, although "born with music in their souls," reached not their matchless attainments, and gave not birth to those almost divine compositions which will perpetuate their genius and their fame to the remotest age of the world, but by the most diligent and unwearied *study.* How much more must the heavenly minstrels be *instructed* in the music which is to employ their tongues in ever-growing melody through eternity! We must be *trained* for heaven. It is a holy place,—it is the dwelling of the Lord,—it is the high throne of the Holy One. We must be constituted for its holiness by becoming holy. Nothing can live in its pure atmosphere but a nature made pure. No heart can sympathise with its atmosphere of love, but a Christ-loving heart. None can hold fellowship with God in heaven but those who have walked in communion with God on earth. None can

unite in the song of the Lamb but those who have learnt its first notes beneath the Cross of Calvary.

Again, the choristers of heaven are represented as "*redeemed.*" O yes! redemption is the condition, the right, the title to their place in the celestial choir. They are there *because* Christ has ransomed and saved them by His most glorious sacrifice. They have been cleansed from the guilt, emancipated from the despotism, and released from the condemnation of sin, by the ATONEMENT of the Son of God. ATONING BLOOD has brought them there,—the blood of the Incarnate God. See how glorious this truth appears, bathed in the light of the throne! "*These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the* BLOOD OF THE LAMB; THEREFORE *are they before the throne of God.*" Listen to their music! "*And they sang a* NEW SONG, *saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast* SLAIN, *and hast* REDEEMED *us to God by* THY BLOOD *out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.*" Are *we* thus prepared to join in the New Song of Heaven? Have we come as sinners to Jesus? have we accepted in faith the Saviour? have we washed in His blood? do we believingly and wholly rely upon His one and finished Sacrifice? and are we growing in holiness, and thus training for the New Song of Heaven?

One more view of this subject yet remains. It is *on earth* this song is learnt. "*Which were redeemed* FROM THE EARTH." It was on earth the grand redemption of the Church was made. This world, fallen, sinful, dark as it is, surpasses in wonder all other material worlds, since it constitutes the redemptive scene of the Church. It was here the Cross was planted,—here the Saviour died,—here the Church was ransomed,—and it is here the Spirit is training God's children for their Father's home. And O in *what* a school! and by how varied a discipline! There is nothing in our individual history, nothing in our Father's dealings,—not a joy nor a sorrow, not a sunbeam nor a cloud-mist, which forms not an element in our preparation for the new song of glory. Earth is training us for heaven! Its discipline of trial and of sorrow, of temptation and of care, is to make us "MEET *to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*" In the night watches God gives us songs, and those songs are stray notes from heaven, which here in the house of our pilgrimage we learn to sing, until we rise to the full anthem of glory. Taught to say, "THY WILL BE DONE," is the highest preparation on earth for the celestial harmonies of the blest; it is to prepare us to take our place in the white-robed choir around the throne, to sing as sweetly, as loudly, and as eternally as they,—"*Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the*

Lamb for ever and ever." Truly does our light and momentary affliction work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. If *this*, O Lord, be the end of all Thy dispensations, *this* the blest result of Thy wise, holy, and loving correction, then do with me as seemeth good in Thy sight. Try me, chasten me, refine me, as Thou wilt, if through the hallowed discipline of earth I am but learning to sing the new, the endless, song of heaven—"WORTHY THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN TO RECEIVE POWER, AND RICHES, AND WISDOM, AND STRENGTH, AND HONOUR, AND GLORY, AND BLESSING."

Jesus, the Lord, their harps employs!
Jesus, my love, they sing!
Jesus, the life of both our joys,
Sounds sweet from every string.

Now let me rise and join their song,
And be an angel too:
My heart, my ear, my hand, my tongue,
Here's joyful work for you.

I would begin the music here,
And so my soul should rise;
O for some heavenly notes, to bear
My passions to the skies!

THE CHURCH OF GOD A GARDEN.

SONG OF SOLOMON IV. 16.

"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

THE fact cannot fail to have impressed the mind of the most cursory reader of the Bible, to how great an extent the *emblematic* character of its teaching prevails. The kingdom of nature, rich and exhaustless in its mine of imagery, is made to illustrate, in some of its most important truths, the higher kingdom of grace, while both do homage to their one Creator and Lord. Thus does the Holy Spirit, in condescension to our finite and fallen minds, *naturalize*, as it were, things that are spiritual, and *humanize*, as it were, things that are Divine. The great central fact of the Gospel, around which all other doctrines cluster,—the Incarnation of the Son of God—supplies the sublimest and most impressive evidence and illustration of this truth.

The Bible is replete with imagery drawn from landscape scenery, designed to set forth spiritual truth. Our

present subject supplies us with an eminent example of this. The Church of God is presented to us in the text under the similitude of a Garden, upon whose sacred plants a two-fold life-giving and fertilizing influence is invoked. "*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.*" There are other instances in which similar imagery is used descriptive of the same truth. Speaking of the Church, the Prophet says:—"*I will sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his* VINEYARD. *My well beloved hath a* VINEYARD *in a very fruitful hill. The* VINEYARD *of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant.*" Again, "*In that day sing ye unto her, a* VINEYARD *of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*" And employing a corresponding image the Apostle addressing the saints reminds them, "*Ye are God's* HUSBANDRY." Thus the Church of God, composed of the one election of grace, is set forth under the similitude of a Garden.

The passage we are about to expound is rich and precious in its spiritual instruction, and will awaken in many an experimental heart a deep, fervent response. It is the prayer of the Church appealing to her loved Lord. Conscious of her mournful declension, thirsting for spiritual quickening, longing for a gracious, restoring visit from Christ, she directs to Him

her earnest and fervent prayer. What an evidence have we here of the deathless nature of real grace in the regenerate soul! The garden of the soul may suffer from a long and withering drought; the plants may droop, the flowers may fade, the fruit may wither, and the whole growth for a while seem stunted; nevertheless, the gracious soul is, in its worst and lowest spiritual state, infinitely better than the graceless soul in its highest and most prosperous carnal condition. It may at times be low water with the Christian's soul. Christ withdrawn, evidences shaded, hope obscured, and joy depressed. Nevertheless, there is the water—the indwelling water of life that never dies, but springeth up into eternal life; and although the tide may ebb, leaving the soul for a season barren and exposed, it will yet return in refulgent and flowing waves, and all shall once more be sunshine and song.

Turn we now to the text. It suggests three things for our contemplation:—The *Garden*—the *Invocation*—the *Fruitfulness*.

The Church of God is represented as a garden. "My garden." It is of the utmost importance that we have Scriptural and correct views of the Church of Christ. The views of many are the opposite of this. Some idolize the Church, and place it above Christ; others ignore it almost entirely. Forgetting that it is the "*light of the world*," the "*salt of the earth*," the "*pillar and ground of the truth*," they would

throw down its walls, upheave its foundations, and virtually efface its very existence; while others, assigning to it a place, conceding to it a power, and investing it with an authority which belong, not to the Church which is the Body, but to Christ, who is the Head, would exalt it above Christ Himself. Guided by the similitude of the passage, let us endeavour to learn what the Holy Spirit would teach us concerning the true nature and properties of Christ's Church, both in its collective and individual capacity.

A garden is a *chosen* and *choice* spot,—so is the Church of God. Election—free, unconditional, holy election—is inseparable from the people of God. Engraved as with the point of a diamond is this precious truth upon every page of the Church's history. The language of the inspired penman is unmistakable.—"*Ye are a* CHOSEN *generation.*" "ELECT *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*" "*According as He hath* CHOSEN *us in Him before the foundation of the world.*" "*I have* CHOSEN *you out of the world.*" "*Knowing brethren beloved your election of God.*" Such is the harmonious teaching of God's Word on this point. The Church of God is a living and lasting monument of His electing love. Those who are taught this truth by the Spirit,—and by the Spirit alone can it be received in the love of it—find it a sweetly comforting, heart-humbling, and soul-sanctifying doctrine. Chosen that we should be *holy*, they find in it

the strongest motive to conformity to the image of God. Elected by an act of sovereign grace, they find it in their experience a most emptying, humbling, truth, ever keeping them in the dust of self-abasement before the Lord. Take comfort and hope from this truth, poor sin-distressed, guilt-burdened soul; for all whom the Father loved, the Saviour died; and all for whom the Saviour died, the Spirit inclines, and draws, and makes willing to come to Christ poor, and empty, and lost,—to be saved wholly, freely and entirely to be saved by Him. So long as Jesus stands ready to save—as able to save poor sinners as He is willing, and as willing as He is able,—hesitate not to accept Him, believe in Him and be saved. Your broken heart for sin, your humbling sense of vileness and unworthiness,—your renunciation of the works of the law, and the deep felt need you have of Christ to justify you, constitute some of the strongest proofs of God's electing love towards you. These are signs and marks of grace. All the Lord's trees of righteousness, all the flowers of His garden reflect these divine hues, and breathe this sacred perfume,—all smite upon the breast and cry—"*God be merciful to me a sinner!*"

Another truth grows out of this. The Lord's people, like a garden, are *an enclosed and separate people.* No two communities are more essentially separate and dissimilar than the *Church* and the *world.* The great

effort of Satan has ever been to annihilate this distinction, and thus to break down the wall of separation between Christ's kingdom and his own; and, alas! many false religious professors have in this been his most zealous and efficient allies. But Christ has left not a shade of doubt resting upon this truth,—viz., the *unearthliness* of His Church, the *unworldliness* of His people. How emphatic and conclusive His memorable declaration—"*My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence.*" * Thus, how clear the nature, constitution, and government of Christ's Church as propounded by its sole Head and Legislator. With this corresponds the preceptive teaching of His Apostles,—"*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" "*Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" "*Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.*" What need we of clearer or more solemn teaching? Can we as professors of Christ unite a compliance of this holy precept with an unholy conformity to the world? Can we be said to "*Come out from among them, touching*

* John xviii. 36.

not the unclean thing," and yet give our personal and practical countenance to the theatre, the opera, the concert, and the card table,—the dance, the turf, and the novel,—or any one of the sinful pleasures, frivolous gaities and vain recreations essentially and professedly of the world? Impossible! The Lord's garden is a *separate* enclosure. Its true plants are transplants, taken out of the world into the Church, henceforth to be a "*chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should show forth the praises of Him, who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.*" "*I have chosen you,*" saith the Lord of the vineyard, "*out of the world.*"

Such is the wide and essential demarkation of the Church of God and the world, and such the baneful effects of attempting their amalgamation, I feel that too great stress cannot be laid upon the importance of absolute *separation* of the Lord's people from the unclean thing. The question is not, how far you may go into the world and not be worldly; nor is it to be decided by the immediate and sensible effect of worldly amusements upon your feelings. A professing Christian may indulge in certain worldly gaities, or employments of questionable propriety, without being conscious of any immediate injury received, and then vainly imagine that He has derived no hurt to himself, whatever it may be with others. But, has no injury in reality been received? Has no evil

influence been exerted upon the spirituality of an easily susceptible and finely-fibered soul? Has not the spirit of devotion been killed, the heart estranged from God, the mind secularized, and all the sweet, holy impressions of religion seriously impaired? Thus the matter is not to be decided by feeling. The question can only be determined by inquiry into the nature, tendencies, and results of scenes enacted at a theatre, —of sentiments promulgated in an amatory novel, —of frivolities indulged in at a ball, upon a soul on whom the solemn vows of holy consecration to God are sealed. Thus the moral injury of worldly conformity to a professing Christian is often in a way of which he is the least conscious. His only safe and consistent path is one of marked and decided separation—combatting with the faith that overcomes the world, and crucifying it by the cross upon which it crucified his Lord and Master.

And yet, as Christians, we must not forget that we have a holy and solemn *mission* to the world. As the "*light of the world*," we are to illumine it; as the "*salt of the earth*," we are to purify it; as the "*pillar and ground of the truth*," we are to "*contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.*" As true loyalists, we are to maintain the crown-rights of Jesus. As members of His body, we are to vindicate His Divine Headship. As graciously saved by His Atonement, we are to testify to the vicarious

nature of His sufferings and death. As His disciples we are to confess Him, to take up His cross and follow Him. As His professing servants, we are to bear the torch-light of His Gospel into all lands, wafting the fragrance of His name and the music of His love upon the wings of every wind, and upon the crest of every billow. Love to Christ's person, attachment to His truth, loyalty to His cause, binds us to obedience, devotion, consecration, and, if need be, to suffering and death, as "*plants of His own right hand planting, that He may be glorified.*" Of what moment, then, that we be holy and consistent in our walk and conversation in and before the world! The eyes of the ungodly are upon us—watching, waiting, hoping for our fall. Let our holy living, let our Christ-like spirit, be a daily, hourly, solemn protest against the wickedness, heartlessness, and emptiness of this ungodly world.

The *unity of Christ's Church* is strikingly illustrated by the similitude of a "garden." A garden is a spot single and complete in itself; in which there exists in all its essential landscape features, the most perfect harmony of character and design. Such is the great truth the similitude illustrates in reference to the Church of God. It is a Divine and sacred *unity*. The body of Christ is *one*.—"*My beloved is* ONE." The unity of the Church is not accidental, dependent upon a sameness of polity, or assimilation of worship, or identity of nations. The unity of the Church is essen-

tial and indivisible. Nothing can destroy the natural, inherent properties of a thing. Divided it may be, dismembered and isolated, but the essential elements themselves must ever maintain their original and indestructible character. Thus is it with the Church of God. It is *essentially one.* There may be different communions, known among men by various human titles, but the Elect Church of God is essentially one Family, one Flock, one Body. No accident can touch the essential unity of the Church. Different forms of Church government and modes of Christian worship may exist, but fail to touch the spiritual life, to dislodge the one indwelling Spirit, or to impair the vital union with Christ the One Head, in which consists the essential union of all the Lord's people—the "*Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.*" How clearly the Apostle presents this interesting truth in his letter to the Ephesian saints. "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*" Evidence, my reader, your oneness to Christ by a manifested love and fellowship with His people. He has given us this test,—"*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" By the same evidence we are personally assured of our spiritual life,—"*We* KNOW *that we have passed from death unto life, because we love*

the brethren." Let it be our earnest endeavour, forgetting our denominational distinctions—which in God's sight are but human—to "*keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;*" every where, and on all occasions, cultivating and enjoying the "*communion of saints,*" as we hope to enjoy it in its plenitude and perfection in the world of glory. God binds all His children in the one Parental heart, and sad were the spectacle of alienation from, or unholy strife with, any of those who repose with us upon that Father's bosom. Thus every tree of righteousness in the Lord's garden is of His own right hand planting; and surely among those who dwell under His shadow, and who derive their fruit from their mutual engrafting into the same Living Vine, and are refreshed and fertilized by the showers of the same Divine Spirit, love, forbearance, confidence, and sympathy should exist and increase more and more. Do all in your power to manifest and promote the *visible* unity of Christ's Church! The benediction of the "peace-maker" will then be yours.

The similitude of the text strikingly illustrates the *sovereign grace* exhibited in the salvation of God's people. A garden partakes originally of the same nature and is intrinsically of the same soil as that from which it was reclaimed. Nothing but the skill and pains and culture of the owner and husbandman have made it to differ from the wilderness by which it is surrounded. How impressively the Apostle puts this truth:—"*You*

hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." And then He traces up the grace that has made us to differ from what we once were, and from what the ungodly world now is, to the "great love wherewith God, who is rich in mercy, hath loved us." Thus, then, nothing but free and sovereign grace has made us what we are. All human boasting, fleshly pride, and self-glorying is laid at the feet of Jesus, and upon His head the crown shall flourish. Thus the Church of God, in its moral relation to the world, becomes what Goshen was to Egypt,—a place of light in the midst of darkness, of plenty in the midst of famine, of rest and repose in the midst of toil and weariness. What infinite wisdom, what marvellous grace are seen in the planting by God of such a garden as the Church, in the midst of such a world as ours. This is the only holy place, this the only fertile enclosure, this the only sun-light spot in this vast wilderness of sin, barrenness, and woe. O what a privilege to be the lowliest plant growing, the obscurest flower blooming, within this divine and spiritual garden.

Lord, 'tis a pleasant thing to stand
In gardens planted by Thine hand;
Let me within Thy courts be seen,
Like a young cedar, fresh and green.

There grow Thy saints in faith and love,
Blest with Thine influence from above;
Not Lebanon, with all its trees,
Yields such a comely sight as these.

As in a garden there is a great *variety of flowers*, so in the Church of Christ. All believers have not the same measure of grace, all have not the same strength of faith, nor have all the same degree of fruitfulness. The Apostle speaks of "babes," "little children," "young men," and "fathers" in the Church; therefore let not one Christian be set against another; let there be no disparaging comparisons, no unholy envyings, no disdainful neglects. What hath made one believer to differ from another, but the sovereignty of the Lord of the vineyard? Rather should the saints of God cultivate towards each other love, forbearance, and humility;—the strong should assist the weak, the advanced should encourage the halting, the joyful should cheer the sad; those of soaring wing should teach to fly the newly fledged, and those who are strong should bear the burden of the burthened; while the faithful and persevering should seek out, restore, and bring back to the fold those who had wandered far away. "*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one*

of us please his neighbour for his good to edification; for even Christ pleased not Himself." Thus much for the garden.

Turn we now to the PRAYER, "*Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden.*" It is, doubtless, the invitation of the Church. Sensible of deadness, drought, and barrenness, she earnestly uplifts her prayer to Christ, desiring quickening, renewing, refreshing. Christ has command of the winds. "*What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the waves obey Him!*" Such is Christ now. There are two opposite winds spoken of in the passage. First, the *north wind*—cold, keen, and cutting. Sometimes the north wind is emblematic of the deepening *law-work* in the soul, which often marks a later stage of the Christian's experience. If his earliest conviction of sin is light and superficial, in a more advanced stage of his spiritual journey he is led into deeper discoveries of his heart's sinfulness. The ploughshare of the Word is inserted, the surface turned up, the fallow ground broken, and the Christian is led to see more of the deep depravity and sinfulness of his nature. O how cold and keen is now the "north wind" of the Spirit thus blowing upon the garden of his soul! Paul's seventh chapter of Romans was written after his conversion,—certainly not before. And who can read and study that remarkable and instructive chapter of his personal experience, and not learn how chill and

piercing and humbling the blast of the north wind may be sweeping across the quickened soul of the man of God, long after he had found refuge in Jesus the Hiding Place. Be not astonished, then, O believer, if the Lord is dealing so with you now. This more pungent conviction of sin, this opening of a new chamber of imagery in your heart, this deeper insertion of the plough of God's Word in your soul, but evidences the truth of your Christianity, proves the reality of your grace; and whilst it shows you more thoroughly the blackness of your heart, unveils more deeply the love of Christ's.

The "north wind" is also an emblem of the *afflictive dispensations* of God in the believer's history, by which soul-fruitfulness is promoted. And O how cold and wintry often this blast! What tender buds it nips, what precious blossoms it blasts, what beauteous flowers it slays of creature good, of earth's treasures! How the cold north wind blew over the garden of good old Jacob, when bereavement and famine overtook him! How wintry the blast over David's garden when Absalom proved a traitor, and would have been a parricide and regicide! How nipping the blast across the domestic garden of Naomi when she exclaimed,—"*Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty!*" How terribly withering the north wind that rushed athwart

the garden of Job, when by one blast, children, and wealth, and herds, and health, were swept from him, and he was left like the scathed oak of the forest! But O how fruitful did all these afflicted saints by this very process become! How the garden of the soul revived, freshened, and blossomed! How real, luxuriant, and golden became the fruits of righteousness in them that were exercised thereby! Shrink not then, beloved, from the cold north wind of God's holy, loving, though trying dispensations. Welcome the influence, however unkindly it may seem to come, which promotes your growth in grace, deepens the Lord's work in your soul, endears the Saviour to your heart, makes sin more hateful, holiness more longed for, and advances your meetness for glory. O precious and welcome blast, concealing beneath its cold, sweeping wing, blessings so holy and precious as these!

"Trials must and will befall:
But with humble faith to see
Love inscribed upon them all,—
This is happiness to me.

"God in Israel sows the seeds
Of affliction, pain, and toil;
These spring up, and choke the weeds
Which would else o'erspread the soil.

"Trials make the promise sweet,
Trials give new life to prayer,
Trials bring me to His feet,
Lay me low, and keep me there!"

And who sends and tempers this north wind? Even Him of whom it is said,—"*He stayeth His rough wind in the day of His east wind.*" Even Him of whom it is written,—"*And Thou shall be a Hiding Place from the wind and Covert from the tempest.*" Jesus controls the winds: He rides upon their wing, makes them subservient to His will, employs them as instruments of accomplishing His purposes of love. And as the north wind scatters the clouds, purifies the air, and checks the too rapid and luxuriant growth of the plants, so the Spirit's deeper conviction of sin and God's afflictive dealings tend but to promote the well-being of the plants of grace which Christ in His garden on earth is preparing for His garden in heaven. Shrink not, then, from the cold, cutting breath of the north wind, my reader, since Jesus sends it, and Jesus controls it, and Jesus employs it, and Jesus will stay its roughness and hide you within His pierced and sheltering side.

But there is also an invitation to the "south wind." "*Come thou south wind and blow upon my garden.*" The South wind—warm, balmy, and fertilizing. Such is another operation of the Holy Spirit, diverse from the preceding, and yet equally promotive of the believer's spiritual fruitfulness. The south wind is emblematic of the "*love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Spirit which He hath given unto us.*" O how warming, how vivifying, and how fructifying God's

love in the soul. Truly it is as the south wind, breathing sweet odours, balmy in its influence, thawing and warming the frozen soul, bringing with it fruitful showers that make the flowers to spring and the plants to grow. How promotive of our fruitfulness is the *love* of Jesus moving us to holy and unreserved evangelical obedience. "*The love of Christ constraineth us;*" and when love enlarges the heart we run the way of the Lord's commandments, in the keeping of which we find a great reward. Seek earnestly this "south wind" to blow upon the garden of your soul. Let *love* be the great influential motive of all you do for the Lord. Let all that springs from the flesh—all that is self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-exalting be dislodged from your doings and your ends, by the love of Christ alone constraining you. Come, O thou south wind of a Saviour's warm, fertilizing, and precious love, and blow upon the garden of my soul!

And what is the holy result of the north and south wind breathing in sweet unison upon the soul? This is the end,—"*That the spices thereof may flow out.*" The true believer desires to be fruitful: he knows that from Christ his fruit is found: he remembers the words of Jesus,—"*As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.*" And now his earnest desire is to rest in Christ—to live upon Christ—to draw large supplies of grace from Christ—to be assured of his union with

Christ—and by looking in faith to Christ continually, so to bring forth "much fruit" to the glory of God the Father. O how fragrant now the fruitful soul! It is "*as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.*" Now the spices—the graces of the Spirit, the fruits of holiness—*flow* forth, to the praise and delight of the heavenly Gardener! They *flow* forth in all their plenitude, richness, and fragrance, and Jesus comes into His garden and eats the pleasant fruit.

Look well to the condition of your soul! Whatever else is neglected, suffer no neglect here. Your spiritual state infinitely outweighs every other consideration. Nothing demands more incessant watchfulness—pruning, weeding, irrigation—since nothing is so susceptible of decay, as the garden of the soul. Guard against the world's blight, the canker-worm of covetousness, the nipping frost of carnal-association, and the withering heat of religious professional excitement, lest the lamentation of old should again be heard,—"*They made me the keeper of the vineyard, but* MINE OWN VINEYARD *have I not kept.*" The moment the discovery is made of dulness and decay send up the earnest prayer,—"*Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south, and blow upon my garden!*" Cultivate this sacred enclosure with sleepless care and divinely-taught skill, that Jesus, your Beloved, may often love to come into His garden and eat His plea-

sant fruits. Remember how precious and delighteous this garden is to Christ—that it cost Him His life to ransom and reclaim. Seek, in earnest prayer to the Holy Spirit, much of His divine, quickening influence. So seek to please Him in your Christ exalting walk—careful not to grieve His love, or restrain His influences—that He may breathe His gentle gales, and unseal His warm springs of grace to make your soul fruitful and fragrant. Then shall "*the Lord guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a* WATERED GARDEN, *and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*" The sacred poet's graphic picture will then be realized in you :—

"We are a garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground ;
A little spot, enclosed by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness.

"Like trees of myrrh and spice we stand,
Planted by God the Father's hand,
And all His springs in Sion flow
To make this young plantation grow.

"Awake, O heavenly wind ! and come,
Blow on this garden of perfume ;
Spirit divine descend, and breathe
A gracious gale on plants beneath.

"Make our best spices flow abroad,
To entertain our Saviour God ;
And faith and love and joy appear,
And every grace be active here."

And when the Lord and Keeper of the vineyard shall come into His garden to gather His lilies,—when the pale reaper invades the Church and gathers from it its greatest ornaments, or enters the domestic garden and breaks the stem of its loveliest and fondest flower—remember that He has taken but what was His own, transplanting it to the paradise above, to bloom and breathe its fragrance in immortal youth and beauty. Say not that they are lost. Faith can see them even now. Their spirits are with the Lord, and their bodies, resting in the dust, shall, at His personal appearing, be raised in incorruption, glory, and power; for this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be then swallowed up in victory.

"*The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*"

"Oh what a garden will be seen,
When all the flowers of grace
Appear in everlasting green,
Before the Planter's face!

"No more exposed to burning skies,
Or winter's piercing cold;
What never-dying sweets will rise
From every opening fold!

"No want of sun or shower above
To make the flowers decline;
Fountains of life and beams of love,
For ever spring and shine.

"No more they need the quickening air,
Or gently rising dew;
Unspeakable their beauties are,
And yet for ever new.

"Christ is their Shade, and Christ their Sun:
Among them walks the King,
Whose presence is eternal noon;
His smile, *eternal spring.*"

THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST'S NAME.

SONG OF SOLOMON i. 3.

"Because of the savour of Thy good ointments Thy Name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee."

THE preceding chapter has spoken of the Church of Christ; the present will speak of Christ the Saviour of the Church. The two sacred themes are mystically and inseparably one. Correct views of the Church will ever be associated with correct views of Christ. Those who would exalt the Church above Christ, can only do so at the expense of Christ Himself. All the undue honour given to the Church, which is His Body, is so much robbery of the dignity, authority, and glory belonging to Christ, who is the Head. The Church of God possesses no legislative authority, no power to enact laws, to decree doctrines, or to institute rites; to control the conscience, or to exact a blind submission of judgment to her interpretation of God's Word. *"The Lord is King in Zion."* *"The Lord is our Law-giver."* But, still the Church of God is a glorious Church, exalted to great privilege, eminence, and power in virtue of her union with Christ her Head. And we cannot

think of her as the mystical Body of Christ, and as the "Pillar and Ground of the truth," apart from the most exalted views of HIM who "*loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.*" No wonder, then, that the Name of Jesus should be precious to the Church: yea, in the experience of all His saints, fragrant as ointment poured forth, awakening their warmest love, and inspiring their loftiest praise.

Let these two points engage our present meditation on the Name of Christ:—the *Fragrance* which it breathes, and the *Love* which it inspires. "*Thy Name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.*"

"What is in a name?" is sometimes flippantly and facetiously asked; and yet there is often magic in a name quite irresistible. Great names are a *power*, a tower of strength; they have often mightier weight and influence in a hero-worshipping world than even sound principles, or holy deeds. If a man's *name* is *great*, he possesses a great power for evil or for good. There are not many independent minds among men; few individuals think for themselves: they like not the trouble of excavating the mine for the hidden treasure, and even when the ore is provided at their hand, they have no skill or taste to smelt, assay, and mould it

for themselves. They would rather accept other men's thoughts than conceive thought for themselves: they prefer to adopt the opinions of others than form their own: and would rather follow and worship an illustrious *name*, than carve their own upon some grateful heart, or upon some imperishable monument of virtue and truth. We have need to be on our watch against this powerful influence lest, fascinated by the fame of some popular leader, we become the willing dupes of a childish superstition, or the blind followers of a fatal error.

Take not your views of Divine truth from man: draw them primarily from God's Word. Study not the Bible through your system, but let your system be taken from, and faithfully weighed with, the Bible. Our system, be it theological or ecclesiastical, must not be allowed to give its complexion to, or to be the interpreter of, revealed truth; but, on the contrary, God's Word is to suggest and mould and tint all our thoughts and opinions and systems for eternity. We must not set the sun by our watch, but our watch by the sun,—in other words, we must not attempt to make God's Word dovetail with our creed, but must test every doctrine we hold, every opinion we receive, every principle we maintain, the hope we cherish, by the unerring standard of revealed truth. This will give a Divine and proper complexion to our views. If we receive the light of the sun through a tinted

lens, the light will necessarily reflect the hue of the medium through which it passes; so, if we receive the light of God's Word through any theological or ecclesiastial system whatever, it will necessarily reflect the error and imperfection, if such there be, of that system. And thus we shall fail to receive the teaching of God as it flows pure and simple from His Word, as light flows from the sun, and as streams from the fountain. The Bible is our rule of faith and our only and ultimate appeal. By the law and the testimony let every doctrine, and system, and hope for eternity be tried. Be not, then, carried away by the learning, the influence, or even the piety attaching to a popular name. Allow no human power the mastery of your mind and conscience: yield yourself meekly and obediently to the authority and teaching of Christ, accepting human guidance only so far as it comes with a "thus saith the Lord" as its divine endorsement. Our only safeguard in a matter of such infinite moment as our future well-being, is God's pure Word; our only secure place, the feet of the Saviour. Sitting there as His lowly disciple, the Holy Spirit will lead our minds into the truth, even "*the truth as it is in Jesus*," as it emanates from Jesus, as it speaks of Jesus, as it strengthens our faith in, and inspires our love to, Jesus, and as it prepares us to go and be with Jesus for ever. But we turn from this digression, to the subject more immediately before us.

The Church declares of the Name of her Beloved, that in her experience it was as ointment poured forth. Our attention is thus invited to *the fragrance of the Name of Christ.* The reference to "ointment" would to the intelligent and pious Jew, be a familiar image. His thoughts would naturally recur to the royal coronation of Solomon, and to the sacred anointing of the priesthood. He would think of the precious and fragrant *materials* prescribed by God for its composition,—the myrrh, the cinnamon, the sweet calamus, the cassia, the oil olive. "*And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary; it shall be an holy anointing oil.*" All these materials were significant. The cassia was medicinal, the myrrh was preservative, the cinnamon was fragrant, the calamus was sweet, and the whole formed a rich unguent, like unto the "*precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments.*" All this was impressively significant of the Name of Jesus. All these properties were typical of Him. His Name is healing, preserving, fragrant and sweet to the spiritual taste. A few particulars will suffice to justify this comprehensive view of what Jesus is to a poor, believing sinner. Let us trace some of the costly and fragrant materials of which the Name of Jesus is composed.

The *Divine* Name of Jesus is fragrant. His Name

is God. "*Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne,* O GOD, *is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom.*"[a] He Himself claims this Divine dignity. "*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord: which is, and which is to come,*—THE ALMIGHTY." We need not, though we might to any extent, multiply these Scripture quotations in proof of the essential Deity of our Lord. If He was not God,—God essential, God absolute,—as well might we fasten our faith to the name of Cæsar, or Napoleon, or Plato, or any other human name, as to any saving benefit we should derive therefrom. I would not trust my soul to a *created* Saviour for millions of worlds. No mere creature could save itself, and must fail, therefore, to save me. Every angel in heaven stands by a power not his own, and all their combined merit and strength could not keep me from falling into the bottomless abyss. Deity, and Deity alone, must save me. How fragrant and precious, then, is the *Divine* Name of Jesus. Believing soul, inhale its rich perfume! When sin distresses you, when guilt burdens you, when sorrow saddens you, when care corrodes you, when difficulties perplex you, when wants alarm you,—remember the *Divine* Name of Jesus, and all will vanish. You trust your salvation to Deity, you hang your burden upon the arm of Deity, you bring your

[a] Habakkuk i. 8.

sin and guilt to the merit of Deity, you make known your need to the resources of Deity, you breathe your sorrow, grief, and woe upon the bosom of Deity, when you hide you within the pavilion of Christ's Name. Rejector of the Saviour's God-head! listen to Jehovah's words concerning Christ and tremble,—"*Beware of Him, and obey His voice, and provoke Him not, for He will not pardon your transgressions, for* MY NAME *is in Him.*"[b]

The *Atoning Name* of Jesus is fragrant. All that Jesus did on earth was representative, substitutionary, sacrificial. His one work was to atone: His one mission was to save. "*Thou shalt call His name* JESUS, *for He shall* SAVE *His people from their sins.*" With this harmonizes the wondrous declaration of the Apostle,—"*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to* SAVE *sinners.*"[c] O marvellous, precious saying this! of more worth to the soul in a dying hour than the diadem of the universe studded with earth's richest jewels. We can pass into eternity peacefully and happily, hopefully and savingly in the faith of no other truth than this,—"*Christ died for our sins;*" "*Christ died for the ungodly;*" "*Christ hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour.*" "*Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things.....but with the precious blood of*

[b] Matt. i. 21. [c] 1 Tim. i. 15.

Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." "*By the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.*" "*Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption.*" Such are some of the Scripture testimonies to the sacrificial work of Jesus. In all this truth how fragrant is His saving Name! As a law-fulfilling, sin-atoning, justice-satisfying Saviour, His Name expresses all that the guiltiest, the most despairing sinner needs. To those who *are* saved, what fragrance breathes from the work of Him who hath saved them, and called them with a holy calling. Whatever may be the advanced pilgrimage, the matured experience of the Christian, he never can release himself from the *first principles* of Divine truth. We close our spiritual course as we began it, with a believing reliance upon the simple *elements* of the Gospel. The foundation truth of the Gospel—*that Jesus Christ saves sinners*,—which gave us comfort and peace and hope when we first fled to the cross, is just the truth which sustains and cheers us when we come to die. We terminate our spiritual life as we commenced it,—clinging as poor, empty, and worthless sinners to Jesus, the Saviour and Friend of sinners; the *last* believing look we have of Christ on earth, is the *first* look we had of Him when He drew us to Himself and told us our sins were all forgiven, and then filled our hearts with His love. Embracing alone the first principles of the Gospel,

resting only in the single, simple, yet sublime declaration that Jesus was sacrificed for, invites and receives, *sinners*—casts out none who come to Him, but saves them to the uttermost,—some of the greatest saints and most eminent divines that ever lived have—either in the near expectation of their departure, or in the actual passage of death—experienced the sweetest peace and richest comfort and most assured hope. We might here cite the case of Bishop Butler, the mightiest of reasoners, who, when he came to die, could find no comfort but from the text quoted by his Chaplain,—"*Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.*" Writing to a minister, the late Robert Hall (one of the most learned divines and eloquent preachers of any age), thus testifies to this truth,—"I have been attacked with a violent fever, and in my own apprehension for about two days was on the borders of eternity. I never before felt my mind so calm and happy. Filled with the most overwhelming sense of my own unworthiness, my mind was supported merely by a faith in Christ crucified. I would not for the world have parted with that text, '*The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.*' I never before saw such a beauty and grandeur in the way of salvation by the death of Christ as on that occasion. I am fully persuaded the Evangelical doctrines alone are able to support the mind in the near view of death and eternity."[d]

[d] *Works of Robert Hall.* Vol. iii., p. 213. American Edition.

What a sacred and precious fragrance of Jesus and His finished work flows from this testimony!

> "Like the sweet South
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,—
> Stealing and giving odour."

But we must limit our illustration of this truth. There were several ingredients, as we have shown, in the sacred ointment that consecrated, all united in imparting to it its efficacy and perfume. There is *everything* we need in Jesus to endear His name to our hearts. He is our Prophet—teaching us the will of the Father: He is our Priest—offering up Himself as our atoning Victim: He is our King—erecting His throne in our hearts, and subduing us to Himself as His loving and obedient subjects. How fragrant, too, His Name as our Friend—loving us at all times. As our Brother—bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, born for our adversity. As our Great High Priest—touched with the feeling of our infirmities, tempted in all points as we are; and in our sorrows, griefs, and trials encircling us with the many-folded robe of His tender, loving sympathy. A few practical inferences must close our meditation upon this delightful theme.

Remember that the Name of Jesus is as ointment *poured forth.* The box must be broken, opened, distributed. It was when the loving woman break the alabaster box that the precious ointment—which was

at once the expression of her love and the anointing of her Lord—filled all the house with its odour. Why is it that the Name of Jesus has no sweetness, no charm, no fragrance to unbelievers? Because the Holy Spirit has not broken the box and *poured out* the ointment upon their hearts. It is not enough to hear of Christ, to read of Christ, to assent to Christ,—we must have Christ in us the hope of glory. We may be enchanted with the box, admire its shape, be charmed with its carving, and yet experience nothing of its precious and priceless contents. In other words, we may be captivated with the elegance of a book, and be enchanted with the eloquence of a sermon, and be drawn in affection to the preacher setting forth the Lord Jesus Christ; and yet His Name may not be to our souls as ointment poured forth,—a name above every name. The precious ointment must become a part of our spiritual being.

But when is the Name of Jesus really as ointment poured forth? It was partially opened to the Old Testament saints who saw Christ's day and were glad. Four thousand years before the great sacrifice upon the cross was made, its fragrance floated upon the sin-tainted atmosphere of Eden. In the first promise of salvation to man the ointment was poured forth. This it was too, which imparted such a sweet smelling savour to the offerings and sacrifices under the law, and so deep a significance to the types, and shadows,

and symbols of the Mosaic dispensation. Christ was the meaning, the sweetness and the substance of all. And yet how partial was the unfolding! "*Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is secret?*" But the full outflow of this precious ointment was reserved for the solemn scene of Calvary. We travel back to "His agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion," in the garden and on Calvary, when the nails cruelly penetrated His hands and feet, when the soldiers rudely pierced His side, when the thorn-crown bound His sacred temples, when the Father bruised and put Him to grief. *Then* was the sacred casket broken,—*then* did the precious ointment pour forth its rich perfume, wafted to the remotest earth, and filling the temple of heaven with its fragrance. O what must have been the wonder—swelling into transport and then bursting into song—when angels and the spirits of the glorified caught the first breath of that precious perfume as it rose from Calvary and ascended into heaven! Around the throne of glory it circled, and Jehovah Himself was well pleased with the sweet smelling savour of that sacrifice, which had harmonized all His attributes and glorified His name in the full salvation of His Church.

The fragrance of this ointment is poured forth when the *pulpit* lifts high the Lamb of God, sets forth the glory, the grace, the love of the Lord Jesus. That is the most fragrant sanctuary, that the holiest atmosphere,

and that the richest temple-service where Christ crucified is the most simply and fully preached. It may be with severe simplicity of ritual, in a rude structure, with but little human talent: nevertheless, Christ is preached, the box of ointment is opened, and the sacred house is filled with the odour thereof. O how great and blessed the privilege of a ministry which sets forth a full Christ for empty sinners, accompanied with the unction of the Spirit, and enfolds our whole being with the fragrance of His Name. I ask not where, nor how, nor by whom: enough that "*Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice; yea, and will rejoice.*"

This ointment is "poured forth" *at the Communion of the Lord's Supper*, when the disciples of Jesus meet in His Name, to remember and commemorate His dying love. Happy, holy season this! Here, if ever, all other names fade for the while from memory, and all our thoughts and affections and desires concentrate upon that one Name, which is above every name —the Name of Jesus, our Redeemer Lord. Approach this sacred banquet, desiring only to meet Jesus. Come to these solemn symbols, these precious memorials of His dying love, looking only to Jesus. Draw near in faith, expecting to meet and to receive a blessing directly from Jesus. It is not *your* name in this ordinance you remember, nor *your* love you celebrate, nor *your* worthiness you present; but the

Name, the love, the worthiness of JESUS. Hesitate not, then, to take your place at the feast, losing your sins, your sorrows, your trials, your wants, yourself in the sweet fragrance of this "ointment," as with a cloud it envelopes you.

This "ointment" is "poured forth" *in Christian communion and fellowship of the Lord's people.* "*Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.*" This is the true idea of the "communion of saints,"—speaking often one to another of JESUS. Christian fellowship is one of the sweetest privileges, one of the most heaven-helpful engagements of the saints on earth. How the ointment flows, how the fragrance diffuses, how the spirit revives, how the heart burns when Christians meet to talk of Jesus. Jesus Himself draws near and communes with them. "*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.*" And where *He* is there is heaven. Aim in every circle to promote the communion of saints—not restricting it to your own peculiar sect, but embracing all of every sect upon whom this fragrant ointment rests. Let not the communion of saints be a cold, dry article of your religious belief, but a vital, influential element of your Christian life. See how the holy Apostle panted for Christian fellowship:—"*I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by*

the mutual faith both of you and me."[e] So let us speak often one to another of Jesus.

"Forgotten be each worldly theme,
When Christians meet together thus:
We only wish to speak of Him
Who lived and died and reigns for us.

"We'll talk of all He did and said
And suffered for us here below,—
The path He marked for us to tread,
And what He's doing for us now.

"Thus, as the moments pass away,
We'll love and wonder and adore,
And hasten on the glorious day
When we shall meet to part no more."

Seek to be a sweet savour of Christ in every place. Be not *ashamed* of Him. The alabaster box must be *opened.* The ointment must be *poured forth.* Christ must be *confessed* before the world. There is no diffusive, reviving, healthful influence where the Name of Jesus is either basely denied, or timidly concealed. We must not be ashamed of our Lord and Master on the one hand, nor, on the other, consulting our personal ease and indolence, selfishly withhold Him from our fellow sinners. The ointment of our right hand must betray us. The world and the saints must take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. Every hour we occupy, every service we engage in, every relation we sustain should be redolent of the ointment

[e] Romans i. 11, 12.

poured forth. We must seek to bring souls to Christ. Life should be one continuous sacred fragance.

But to this end we must be more with Jesus the Anointed One. The spiritual verdure that clothes us, the divine fruit that enriches us, and the holy fragrance our personal religion sheds around us, emanates from Christ. We must *know* our union with Christ. We must walk with Christ. We must *abide* in Christ. We must open the conservatory of the soul and let the Divine Sun shine in upon the flowers. We must throw wide every avenue of the heart that the ointment may penetrate, yea even saturate, our entire being,—blending Jesus with every sorrow, entwining Him with every joy, and associating Him with every service. Thus will our "*garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the very palace;*" and we shall go forth to duty, to suffering, and to toil, perfuming the moral atmosphere in which we move with the odoriferous influence of His precious Name.

This ointment possesses a marvellous soothing, mollifying virtue *in seasons of sorrow.* Never is the Name of Jesus, as the "Brother born for adversity," more precious to the believing heart than in the time of adversity. It would seem as if Jesus bore a title appropriate to *every* condition of the believer's life. It pleased the Father that in Him, as the Mediator of His Church, ALL fulness should dwell,—all fulness for all circumstances. But especially does His life

of sorrow fit Him to be "*the Consolation of Israel.*" Born in adversity,—Sharon's Rose bruised and crushed by God, by man, and by Satan,—how well was Jesus fitted by the discipline through which He passed, to enfold His suffering Church within the robe of human sympathy. You are, perhaps, smarting under the severe chastening of your Heavenly Father. The vase is shattered, and the flower that lent to life its sweetest perfume lies smitten and trailing in the dust, and the hand of God is heavy upon you. But think of the Name of Jesus,—what it involves. Think of it as containing all, and infinitely more, than you have lost. Recall the sweetness of a wife's fond love, of a husband's faithful protection, of a child's tender devotion, of a friend's soothing sympathy, of a minister's unvarying kindness: yea, the sweetness of every earthly good you once possessed, but possess no longer. Then remember that all this is in Christ: that all this affection, all this counsel, all this care, all this sympathy, and all this pleasantness distilled from Him, the infinite Spring-head of all blessing. O what a mercy that, when the rivulet is dried, and the stream is gone, and the cloud shades the pleasant picture that adorned with its presence and brightened with its smile our home-circle, Christ remains a sufficient substitute for all—all of which combined could never have been an all-satisfying substitute for Him. Accept, then, the fragrant sympathy of Christ. No being in the

universe is so near to you, loves or compassionates you so deeply in your present calamity as Christ does. Deem it not hard that He has dealt with you thus. He has but transferred the flower from your bosom to His own,—transplanting it to a sunnier and holier clime. Jealous of your love, He would have your undivided heart, and absorb your whole being in Himself. And O how honoured and blest you now are! You shall *experimentally* know more of Christ, see more clearly His surpassing glory, drink more deeply His fathomless love, and experience more fully His tender sympathy than in all the past of your experience. It is only in the school of adversity that we really know what the Lord Jesus is. How much we learn from Him and of Him in *one* trial! Until the trial brought us sobbing upon His heart, how little we knew what that heart contained. Welcome, then, the grief that lifts you nearer to God, and that increases your acquaintance with, and your peace and joy in, the Lord Jesus.

Equally salutary is this sacred "ointment" in its influence upon the *intellectual* powers of the soul. It enlightens and quickens the *mind*. The human intellect is dark, stunted, and scentless, until it knows Christ; and until it knows Christ by the teaching of the Spirit—that anointing that teacheth us of all things —it knows not God. We may put it simply thus. Christ is the true Revealer of God,—God is the great

Object of man's knowledge,—therefore, we must know Christ Jesus properly and savingly to know God. Thus he who becomes a humble and earnest student at Christ's feet, however limited his intellectual powers, really knows more of the wisdom and power and goodness of God, than the most learned astronomer, the profoundest philosopher, or the wisest sage, whose research has been limited by the range of creation. Thus the study of Christ strengthens the intellect, while the knowledge of God thus gained enriches, sanctifies, and ennobles it. Would you quiet and sooth your *heart?*—bring it in close contact with Christ's human sympathy. Would you enlarge and enrich your *mind?*—bring it into believing contact with Christ's Divine person. O to know Jesus, that most excellent and superlative knowledge! With Paul we may well count all things but loss for its possession. To know Him as the Saviour, to know Him as our Friend, to know Him as our Brother, to know Him as our Advocate, to know Him as our Portion, is endless life and glory. "*This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.*" My reader, when death approaches what will all your human learning and science avail you, without a knowledge of Christ? What if you fathom all mysteries but the great mystery of God's love in Jesus, and understand all knowledge but the knowledge that you are saved? In that very hour all your worldly, self-

righteous, and erroneous thoughts perish. But a spiritual knowledge of the Saviour will stand by you at that awful moment, sustain and comfort you, and light your soul's pathway to glory.

It is the fragrance of this ointment which imparts such sacred and divinely acceptable perfume *to the believer's prayers.* What, O suppliant, bending before the mercy-seat, gives such touching eloquence and such irresistible power to the devout breathings of your heart, to the faint and faltering utterances of your lips, filling the temple above with their fragrance? It is the power of Jesu's atoning merit, investing with its incense-cloud every petition you send up to heaven. "*Whatsoever*" (says the Saviour) "*you ask in My Name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye will ask anything in My Name, that will I do.*" O for more faith in the power of prayer offered in the Name of Jesus! Not for thy merit, O suppliant, will God grant this request, nor for thy demerit will He deny it,—but He will do it all for Christ's sake. Approach then, sad heart, the mercy-seat. Thou wavest in faith the true censer, whose much incense is offered with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne, when thou askest thy blessing and presentest thy petition and maketh thy confession of sin, in the Name of Jesus, which wafts it to heaven as the sweetest perfume. Thou

needest no interceding virgin, no praying saint, no suppliant angel, no human merit, of thine own. Jesus supplies it all.

"Jesus alone shall hear my cries
Up to His Father's throne:
He, dearest Lord, perfumes my sighs,
And sweetens every groan.

"Petitions now and praise may rise,
And saints their offerings bring:
The Priest, with His own sacrifice,
Presents them to the King."

So powerful is this "ointment," it imparts an undying fragrance to all it touches. A sphere the most obscure, a craft the most lowly, a service the most feeble associated with Christ becomes sacred and ennobled. One touch of Christ sanctifies and immortalizes all. O how the sacred perfume lives! Years have passed away, time's many chequered, changeful scenes have transpired, and yet the remembrance of that holy life smells sweet and blossoms from the dust. Through some living character it aided to form,—or some eminent intellect it taught to shoot,—or some Christian work it indirectly started,—or in some printed narrative which records its history, the fragrance of that one life devoted to God still lives, and will live for ever. What holy fragrance, too, breathes from pious works penned centuries ago! And why? Because the holy men who wrote them

were baptized in the perfume of Christ's Name. Of Him they wrote, to Him they still bear witness, and every page is redolent of the sweetness of His truth. Who can turn over the pages of Charnock, and Caryl, and Traill, and Rutherford, and Leighton, and Bunyan, and a host of others, and not feel how precious and undying is the fragrance that flows from Christ through the writings of His servants long since gathered unto Him, who set forth the glories of His person, the perfection of His work, the greatness of His love, and the preciousness of His Word. Would that the pulpit and the press,—the preaching and the literature of the nation,—were more deeply imbued with the fragrance of this divine ointment, — with the principles, and precepts, and spirit of Christ's holy Gospel! Of this we are thoroughly persuaded, that the influence of this anointing is the only safe-guard of the nation's pulpit, and the only conservative element of the nation's sacred literature.

One or two words of caution. Be watchful against that which would mar the sweet savour of this holy ointment, and change its perfume into a pestilent odour. There are many decomposing influences destructive of this sacred confection, against which we must be prayerfully vigilant. Inbred corruption,—unholy selfishness,—morbid irritability,—an uncharitable spirit, —an unsanctified temper,—levity of manner,—tampering with error,—sporting with sin,—trifling with

sin,—needless exposure to tempation,—are as "*dead flies which spoil the ointment,*" and cause it to send forth an ill savour. Let us then—as the Lord's anointed, as the royal priesthood upon whose head the golden oil has been poured—bear it holily, employ it usefully, and in its sacred fragrance walk humbly with our God.

A second caution is,—beware of mixing up with this Divine ointment, aught of your own miserable invention, or of sinfully attempting its imitation. God gave especial instructions respecting this point:—"*Whosoever compoundeth any like it, shall even be cut off from the people.*"[f] God's work is perfect—Christ's salvation is complete—the Saviour's sacrifice is finished, and needs no creature merit, or human ceremonial to perfect its efficacy or heighten its splendour. Jesus is the one and only Saviour of sinners,—"*Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.*" Away, then, with all your vain, contemptible, and sinful attempts to add to the virtue, fragrance, and worth of this Divine and precious ointment by self-righteous doings, dead duties, and worldly ritual of your own. Attempt to improve God's works in creation if you will,—add warmth to the sun-beam, glow to the stars, beauty to the lily, fragrance to the violet, lustre to the diamond, and let your littleness

[f] Exodus xxx. 33.

and folly be manifest,—but lay no unhallowed hand upon the Ark of salvation, mix no human ingredient with the anointing of God, tamper not with the fragrance, preciousness, and efficacy of the NAME of JESUS, lest you perish in your sin, and your crime be written in eternal misery, lamentation, and woe.

Deep and lasting *is* the *love to Jesus* which the fragrance of this ointment inspires. "*Therefore do the virgins love Thee.*" When the Holy Spirit opens up this glorious Gospel—the Divine and precious box—and reveals the Name of Jesus to the heart, love admiring, love adoring, love obeying, love serving, love sacrificing, love assimilating will bear the whole being onward by its all-commanding and irresistible force. Would you love the Saviour with a more intense and influential affection? Inhale much of the fragrance of His Name, and ask for more copious effusion upon your soul of this Divine and precious ointment. Seek in every service and in every trial, and in every duty, with David, to be "*anointed with* FRESH *oil.*"

Unconverted sinner! You may think lightly of the Name of Jesus now. You may hate and despise it. It may have no music in your ear, or sweetness to your soul. But remember that the day is coming —how fast it speeds!—when, "*at the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of*

God the Father." In that last great day your knee shall bow, either in adoring love or in trembling submission —yes, even *yours!* Bow your heart to Him now, that it may be well with you in that solemn day.

And what, we ask, in conclusion, is that which makes your sick-room so sweet, and your dying-bed so pleasant? It is Christ's precious name poured forth. Death, so dreaded by others, will come to you, around whose pillow glory streams down from Immanuel's land, wearing a countenance of beauty and a robe of fragrance, supremely, unutterably glorious and precious. The departing believer views death through Christ, the lovely and the conquering One; and so death looks comely, pleasant, and harmless. Oh! *then*, as, perhaps, never before, the Holy Spirit will unseal this sacred box of ointment, and the NAME OF JESUS, when every other name has faded, will cling to your memory and heart, thou blest saint, departing now amid its life-sustaining and heaven-wafting fragrance. "UNTO YOU THEREFORE WHICH BELIEVE HE IS PRECIOUS."

"There is a NAME I love to hear;
I love to sing its worth:
It sounds like music in mine ear,—
The sweetest name on earth.

"It tells me of a Saviour's love,
Who died to set me free:
It tells me of His precious blood,—
The sinner's perfect plea.

"It tells me of a Father's smile
Beaming upon His child:
It cheers me through this 'little while,'—
Through desert, waste, and wild.

"It tells me what my Father hath
In store for every day;
And though I tread a darksome path,
Yields sunshine all the way.

"It tells of One whose loving heart
Can feel my smallest woe;
Who in each sorrow bears a part
That none can bear below.

"It bids my trembling soul rejoice,
And dries each rising tear:
It tells me, in a 'still small voice,'
To trust and not to fear.

"Jesus! the name I love so well,—
The name I love to hear!
No saint on earth its worth can tell;
No heart conceive how dear.

"This name shall shed its fragrance still
Along this thorny road;
Shall sweetly smooth the rugged hill
That leads me up to God!

"And there, with all the blood-bought throng,
From sin and sorrow free,
I'll sing the new eternal song
Of Jesus' love to me!"

THE BURDEN CAST UPON GOD.

PSALM lv. 22.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."

WHOSE eye will light upon this the closing meditation of our volume, and feel that the character which these remarkable words portray belongs not to him? Who is not *burdened?* Who bears not some heavy load, staggers and faints not under the pressure of some galling, perhaps, crushing weight of infirmity, trial, or cross, along life's crowded avenues? There is no saving clause in the covenant of grace exempting the saints of God from burdens. Yea, the very provision of that covenant—"*a covenant ordered in all things*"—implies their existence, their varied character, and deep necessity. The covenant of grace is made for a poor and an afflicted people whom the Lord has left in the midst of Zion. To know from experience what the fulness and preciousness of that covenant is, we must be emptied, tried, burdened. It is only the poor sinner that lives upon Christ's wealth, the empty soul that lives upon Christ's fulness, the feeble saint that lives upon Christ's

power, the tried, afflicted, and tempted believer that lives upon Christ's grace, sympathy, and love. The extent of our conscious need is the measure of our life of faith on Jesus. We ally weakness with His strength, demerit with His righteousness, indigence with His opulence, and hang the empty vessel upon His unbounded and fathomless sufficiency. Beloved, entwine as a thread of gold with the ministry of home this precious thought:—"MY EMPTINESS FITS ME FOR CHRIST'S FULNESS, AND CHRIST'S FULNESS IS DESIGNED FOR MY EMPTINESS."

But what an exceeding great and precious exhortation and promise is this:—"CAST THY BURDEN *upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.*" The marginal reading is, "*thy gift.*" We accept both readings as correct. All that we receive from the Lord we receive as a gift,—the gift of His most free grace and love. The believer sees and tastes free grace in *every* blessing of His Heavenly Father. He traces it in the sun that cheers him, in the spring that refreshes him, in the breeze that fans him, in the flowers that delight him. He sees it in the love that comforts him, in the friendship that strengthens him, in the sympathy that soothes him, in the outstretched hand that relieves his want. Nay, more. The child of God sees free grace—a Father's gift—in every cloud that darkens, in every sorrow that embitters, in every disappointment that wounds, in every burden that

crushes. But infinitely beyond all, he sees and tastes free grace in the blood that pardons him, in the righteousness that justifies him, in the love that adopts him, in the voice that calls him, and in the promises that engage to bring him home to glory. Over the "door of hope" opened to us down in the dark "valley" of our poverty and nothingness, the marvellous words are emblazoned—"BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED." All these as gifts, natural and spiritual, are to be cast upon the Lord; in other words, employed in His service and devoted to His glory. Is it talent? is it wealth? is it influence? is it time? is it grace?—cast thy gift—whatever the *one* talent may be—upon the Lord; consecrating all to, and employing all unreservedly for, Him.

But we restrict our exposition of the passage to the received text. "*Cast thy* BURDEN *upon the Lord.*" The Lord's people are truly a *burdened* people. They of the whole creation are the most burdened. They are conscious of burdens of which the unregenerate world is totally unconscious. In the first place, beloved, are you sensible of the burden of *sin?* This is an evidence of spiritual life. As a dead body has no sensibility and feels no pressure, so a soul dead in trespasses and in sins has no consciousness of the body of sin and of death to which it belongs. A corpse does not weep, nor groan, nor sigh, nor bewail its humiliated condition; neither does a spiritually dead

soul cry out from its grave of corruption, "*O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and of death?*" And why not? Because there is no life, and where there is no life there is no sensibility. If, my beloved, conscious sin is your burden, —if your heaviest sigh, your deepest groan, your bitterest tear springs from the feeling of indwelling sin, it is one of the strongest evidences of spiritual life, —that you are in truth a *living* soul. The Spirit of God has breathed divine life into you, and thus quickened and vitalised, you cry, "*Woe is me! for I am undone, because I a man of unclean lips.*" Go, ye who despairingly have thought that you had no affiliated relation to the children of God, since you discern so much in your heart contrary to the Father's nature, and so much in your spirit contrary to the image of the brethren, and who in view of this exclaim, "*I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,*" —take the comfort to yourself that, this conscious burden proves your possession of spiritual sensibility, and this bitter bewailment evidences the life of God in your soul. O yes, the Lord's people are a burdened people, and the burden of indwelling sin is the greatest burden of all.

Such, too, is the burden of the newly awakened soul. Whence the great inquiry,—"*What shall I do to be saved?*" Whence the touching appeal,—"*Lord, help me!*" Whence the agonizing cry,—"*God be mer-*

ciful to me a sinner!" O it springs from the awakened conscience, from the guilt-distressed soul,—the sinner just made to feel his sins a burden, convinced that he is poor and wretched, lost and undone, and without Christ must perish for ever. To whom did the Saviour address that wondrous invitation, the power and savour of which will continue until the last awakened sinner shall look to Christ and live: "*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" O it was to just such as you! Has the Spirit discovered to you your sinfulness, shown you to yourself as "poor, and blind, and miserable, and naked"? Does your load of sin seem too great for you to bear? Come and cast it upon Christ, the sinner's great Sin-Bearer. This great, gracious, and free invitation is addressed, thou guilt-burdened soul, to thee, and nothing shall dare forbid your acceptance. Christ speaks it, Christ means it,—and who shall say, Nay, when Christ says, Yea? The love that bids you come, will be accompanied with the *power* that enables you to come and in simple faith cast that burden of sin and guilt upon the loving, Almighty Saviour, who alone can unclasp it from thy soul, and give thee rest. You have nothing to do either with its material or its dimension. That is Christ's concern. Yours is simply to *believe* that He sorrowed for it in Gethsemane, died for it on the cross, and now invites you to transfer it to Him, seated in glory upon His throne. You have nothing

to do in the matter but believingly to take Him at His word, and so find rest for your guilt-oppressed and sin-weary spirit.

Come unto Me, ye weary: Come!
Ye heavy-laden, cease to roam!
I will refresh the weary breast,
And give the labouring spirit rest.

Sweet word! it calms my troubled soul,
It bids my sorrow cease to roll;
Smiles like the rainbow on the deep,
And hushes all my woes to sleep.

Perhaps a sense of *backsliding from the Lord* is your burden. You did run well, walked closely with God, and loved to feed in green pastures with the flock and beside the Shepherd's tent; but you did not love the fold, and went away and walked no more with Jesus. And now the Shepherd has gone after you, and by the gentle moving of His Spirit on your heart is drawing you back with weeping, and mourning, and confession. Your departures are a grievous and a heavy burden, and like Ephraim you smite upon the thigh, and are ashamed, you are even confounded, and exclaim, "*Turn Thou me and I shall be turned, for Thou art the Lord my God.*" Come, then, poor backslider, thou wanderer from the Shepherd's side, thou truant from the fold, and listen to the tender, forgiving language of that God and Father against whom thou hast sinned.—"*Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a*

pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Approach, thou penitent soul,—though a wanderer, still a son; though a backslider, still a child,—and cast the burden of thy back-slidings upon Jesus, whose unchanging love and restoring grace are now gently and effectually drawing thee back to Himself. "*I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee.*"

Return, O wanderer! Return,
And seek an injured Father's face;
Those warm desires that in thee burn
Were kindled by recovering grace.

Perhaps your burden is *mental.* There is, probably, no pressure so acutely felt as that in which the *mind* is more immediately concerned. Any trial—be it spiritual or temporal—which implicates the mental powers, entails a burden which nothing short of supernatural power can sustain. The Lord has seen fit to send this cloud-veil upon your mind, which for a time shades your Christian evidence, obscures your hope, weakens your hold upon the Saviour, depresses you to despondency and drives you almost to despair. And now you question the sincerity of your Christian profession, you doubt the reality of your conversion, and are ready to ignore the hope of heaven which you once

so happily cherished. All this, however, is the effect only of a mind morbidly, nervously, and for a season, temporally unhinged; but whose spiritual regeneration, whose hidden life, and whose eternal safety nothing can touch. Creation illustrates this idea. The sun is eclipsed, but not annihilated. The stars are veiled, but not extinguished. Dark clouds may drape Christ from the believer's eye, but nothing extinguishes, or can for a moment lessen, His great love to His saints. Mental depression may obscure your Christian evidences—those stars of the soul which smile upon it so cheeringly—but the Divine seal of the Spirit nothing can ever efface. The child of the light may walk in darkness and be a child of the light still,—for once a child, ever a child! Such is the burden which the Lord invites you to cast upon Him! No saint or angel can sympathize with it as Jesus can. He passed through mental distress infinitely darker and more crushing than yours. And will He suffer you to succumb to this temporary eclipse, or permit you to sink beneath these dark waters? Will He suffer the enemy always to take advantage of your physical infirmities, thus to work upon your mental and spiritual feelings, producing so much gloom, disquietude, and distress? O no! In the exercise of His Divine power He will cry,—"*Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.*" The darkness and the light are both at His command, and both, in the

experience of His saints, work together for good. If ever the sympathy of Him who in the terrible and unparalled darkness of His soul exclaimed, "*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me,*" flowed out toward you, it is now. And think you that this temporary darkness of the mind through which you are passing, lessens the love, or shakes the faithfulness, or impairs the power of your covenant God and Father? Impossible! Listen to His marvellous language. "*The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.*" Cheer up, then, thou sad and desponding one! Why art thou cast down? Hope in God, for this long, dreary night of weeping shall, ere long and for ever, merge into a bright morning of joy.

Heavy, too, is the *burden of affliction.* Who counts not this among the many which he bears along the weary, dusty road of life? "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous.*" And again: "*The Lord trieth the righteous.*" Yet again: "*Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.*" Thus if you are an afflicted saint, a tried believer, a chastened child, burdened with carping cares, corroding anxieties, heart-crushing sorrows, and heavy stripes, you wear but the stars and orders of the spiritual realm to which you belong, and possess but the seals and

evidences of a nobler sonship and closer relationship to God than angels claim. "*If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons.*" Accept, then, in meekness and love these Divine evidences — these sacred proofs of adoption—even the many trials, sore temptations, and painful corrections with which your Heavenly Father, in love, sees fit to visit you.

But, perhaps, your *home*-duties, trials, and wants, form your burden. Every home is an embryo kingdom, an epitomised world, of which the parent constitutes the sovereign. There are laws to be obeyed, rules to be observed, subjects to be governed, cares to to be sustained, demands to be met, and "who is sufficient for all this?" is often your anxious inquiry. Who can tell what crushing burdens, what bitter sorrows, what corroding cares, what pressing demands, may exist within a single family circle, deeply veiled from every eye but God's! You are perhaps a widower—bereaved and desolate; or you are a widow—lonely and helpless. Your children are an anxiety, your domestics a trial, your necessities are pressing, your whole position one of embarrassment and depression. What shall you do? Do even as the Lord who loves you enjoins,—"*Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.*" Your Heavenly Father knows all your home-trials, for He has sent them. Jesus, though he had no home on earth, yet sympathised with the home-cares and sorrows of others, and is not a stran-

ger nor indifferent to yours. Bring all to Him, tell Him all, confide to Him all, trust Him in all. You have no family trial too great, and no domestic want too little, and no home-sorrow too delicate, to take to Christ. Obey the precept,—"*Cast thy burden upon the Lord;*" and He will make good the promise,—"*and He shall sustain thee.*" O costly and blessed home-burden that brings Jesus beneath our roof!

But who is our Burden-Bearer? "*Cast thy burden* UPON THE LORD." JEHOVAH-JESUS is the great Burden-Bearer of His people. No other arm, and no other heart, in heaven or upon earth, were strong enough, or loving enough, to bear these burdens but His. He who bore the weight of our sin and curse and shame in His obedience and death,—bore it along all the avenues of His weary pilgrimage, from Bethlehem to Calvary,—is He who now stretcheth forth His Divine arm, and makes bare a Brother's heart to take thy burden of care and of grief, dear saint of God, upon Himself. Can you for a moment question either His power or His love after all that He has done for you? This were cruel unbelief indeed!

But how shall we, how can we, describe the *tenderness* of Christ towards His burdened ones, and the *gentleness* with which He leads them? "*He shall gently lead them that are with young,*"—them that are *burdened.* You are wearied. Your deep afflictions are a burden. Your sinful heart is a burden. Your want

of faith, and love, and fruitfulness is a burden. You are, as it were, "with young," passing through much sore and painful travail of soul, a burden to yourself, cast down and discouraged by reason of the way. But oh, blessed solace!—Jesus *leads* you, and leads you gently. All others would *drive* you,—man would drive you, the world would drive you, Satan would drive you, your own impulsive heart and blind judgment would drive, and even the saints would drive you,—but Jesus *leads* you, and leads you tenderly, skilfully, and safely. He is the loving, careful Shepherd who overdrives not His sheep, especially the weak, the sick, the burdened, the little ones of His flock. He knows *your* burden,—"*thy* burden." The marvellous language of God is "I KNOW *their sorrows*." He knows how thy friend that loved thee is gone like a shadow, how thy gourd that sheltered thee is smitten in a night, how the voice that was the sweetest music to thee is hushed in the stillness of death, how the strong and beautiful staff that supported thee is broken and lies a ruin in the dust. Jesus knows all,—and He is leading you through all. He is leading you by these very self-same dark providences,—these events that appear so adverse, this way that seems so dark, these dealings that seem so mysterious, painful, and crushing. How precious and soothing is the promise—"*I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them*

in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." As Jesus thus gently leads, so let us meekly, confidingly follow, believing that His hand is powerful, His heart is loving, His eye is unslumbering, and that He is leading us by the right way home to be with Him for ever.

But the question will arise in your heart, How am I to cast my burden upon Him? The answer is at hand. In *faith* and by *prayer*. It is by an act of simple, prayerful faith we transfer our cares and anxieties, our sorrows and wants, to the Lord. Only believe that God is able to do all that you need, and ask Him to do it. Only believe that Christ is willing to grant all that you request. Only believe that He is most true, most loving, most faithful when He invites you come and lean upon Him, and to lean with all your might upon that arm that balances the universe, and upon that bosom that bled for you upon the soldier's spear. Perhaps faith and unbelief are now struggling painfully within your tried and anxious heart. You believe that God is *able* to bear your burden, but you question His *willingness* to bear it. Or, perhaps, you question not His readiness, but you doubtingly ask, "Is the Lord *able* to do this thing for me?" And thus, while you are debating a matter

about which there is not the shadow of a shade of doubt, the burden is crushing your gentle spirit to the dust. And all the while Jesus stands at your side and lovingly says,—"Cast thy burden upon *Me* and I will sustain thee. I am God Almighty. I bore the load of thy sin and condemnation up the steep of Calvary, and the same power of omnipotence, and the same strength of love that bore it all for thee then, is prepared to bear thy care, and want, and sorrow *now*. Roll it all upon Me."

Child of my Love! lean hard,
And let me feel the pressure of thy care.
I know thy burden, child! I shaped it—
Poised it in mine own hand—made no proportion
Of its weight to thine unaided strength;
For even as I laid it on, I said—
'I shall be near, and while she leans on me
This burden shall be mine, not hers;
So shall I keep my child within the circling arms
Of mine own love.' Here lay it down: nor fear
To impose it on a shoulder which upholds
The government of worlds. Yet closer come!
Thou art not near enough: I would embrace thy care,
So I might feel my child reposing on my breast.
Thou lovest me! I know it. Doubt not, then;
But—loving me—*lean hard.*

And how precious and assuring the promise,—"*He shall* SUSTAIN *thee.*" The terms of the promise are clear. It is not that the Lord will *remove* the burden, but that He will *sustain* us under it. He gives us what is equivalent, and, perhaps, more than equiva-

lent to its removal,—grace to endure, and strength to carry it,—so that we reap more spiritual blessing, and He receives more Divine glory, than would accrue from its entire removal. Read the histories of the saints, and learn how they illustrate and confirm this truth. Look at Jacob, in danger from the revenge of Esau, casting his burden of anxiety and fear upon God,—God did not remove it, but sustained His servant, and brought him safely through. Look at Elijah, fleeing for his life from the threatenings of Jezebel,—how God met him in his weariness and petulance, nourished and sustained him in the wilderness, so that in the strength of that meat he travelled forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God. Look at Paul, afflicted with the thorn in the flesh, thrice asking, and thrice denied, its removal,—yet so sustained by the all-sufficiency of Christ's grace, that he glories in its existence, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. And what has been, is still the experience of the Lord's people,—that when He does not immediately remove a burden, He imparts all-sufficient grace and strength to bear it. And O how much greater a blessing to be daily upheld by the power of God, sustained by the grace of Christ, and comforted by the consolation of the Spirit, than, with the immediate and entire removal of the burden, to lose all the sweet, sanctifying blessings that directly spring from it. A prolonged affliction is often

a prolonged mercy. The tedious illness never alleviated—the couch of weakness never left—the whitened furnace never extinguished—the daily cross never lightened: O who can describe what sweet mercy flows through this channel—what sweet nourishment comes from this eater,—how glorious and precious the Saviour becomes,—and how the daily burden proves a daily confirmation of the truth and experience of the great promise of God. *"As thy day so shall thy strength be."*

And when we arrive at heaven, and survey in the light of its glory all the way the Lord our God led us thither,—when we review every cross and every bereavement, every want and every correction, we shall then see the covenant faithfulness of God, the tender love of Christ, and the gentle grace of the Spirit, in not removing the burden, nor lifting the cross, nor taking our feet out of the thorny, flinty path, but in giving us instead, what was a richer, holier blessing—the upholding of His power, the sustaining of His grace, and the consolation of His love. Accept then, my beloved—and this shall be my last exhortation,—accept in meekness and faith your burdens as from the Lord. Seek that they may make you more holy, may endear Jesus to your heart, meeten you for heaven, and bring much praise, and glory, and honour to your covenant triune God. They then shall be as pinions to thy soul, bearing thee upon their

gold-plumed wing higher, and yet higher towards heaven, in faith, love, and prayer, until, delivered from the burden of the flesh, thou shalt enter into eternal joy and felicity,—FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.

Look onward still!
However dark the night may be,
The morning breaketh joyously;
Wars after wars may come and go,
And billows seem to overflow;
Thy Father's hand a bound will set,
His love is deeper—deeper yet.

Lean on this love!
Oh, earthly love hath little power
To cheer thee in thy saddest hour;
And with thy lonely, bitter lot,
The stranger intermeddleth not;
But there is One whose sympathy
Can prove enough for thee.

Are there none left,—
None, whom thy life may help to show
How vain and empty all below?
To shine as brightest stars is given
To those who point the way to heaven:
If such shall be their glorious state,
'Tis blessed, then, to work and wait.

Say not, "'tis long!"
This sin-stained world is not to be
Thy haven for eternity:
The aching heart, the heavy trial,
Are only for a "little while:"
Patient, thine upward pathway trace
Unto thy Father's dwelling place.

Joy cometh then !
For when faith's less-enduring light
Is changed for perfect, lasting sight,
And hearts that e'en on earth seemed one
Shall beat in perfect unison,
And, leaning on a Father's breast,
His weary child shall be at rest.

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